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Is Dion's carbon tax an insane idea?

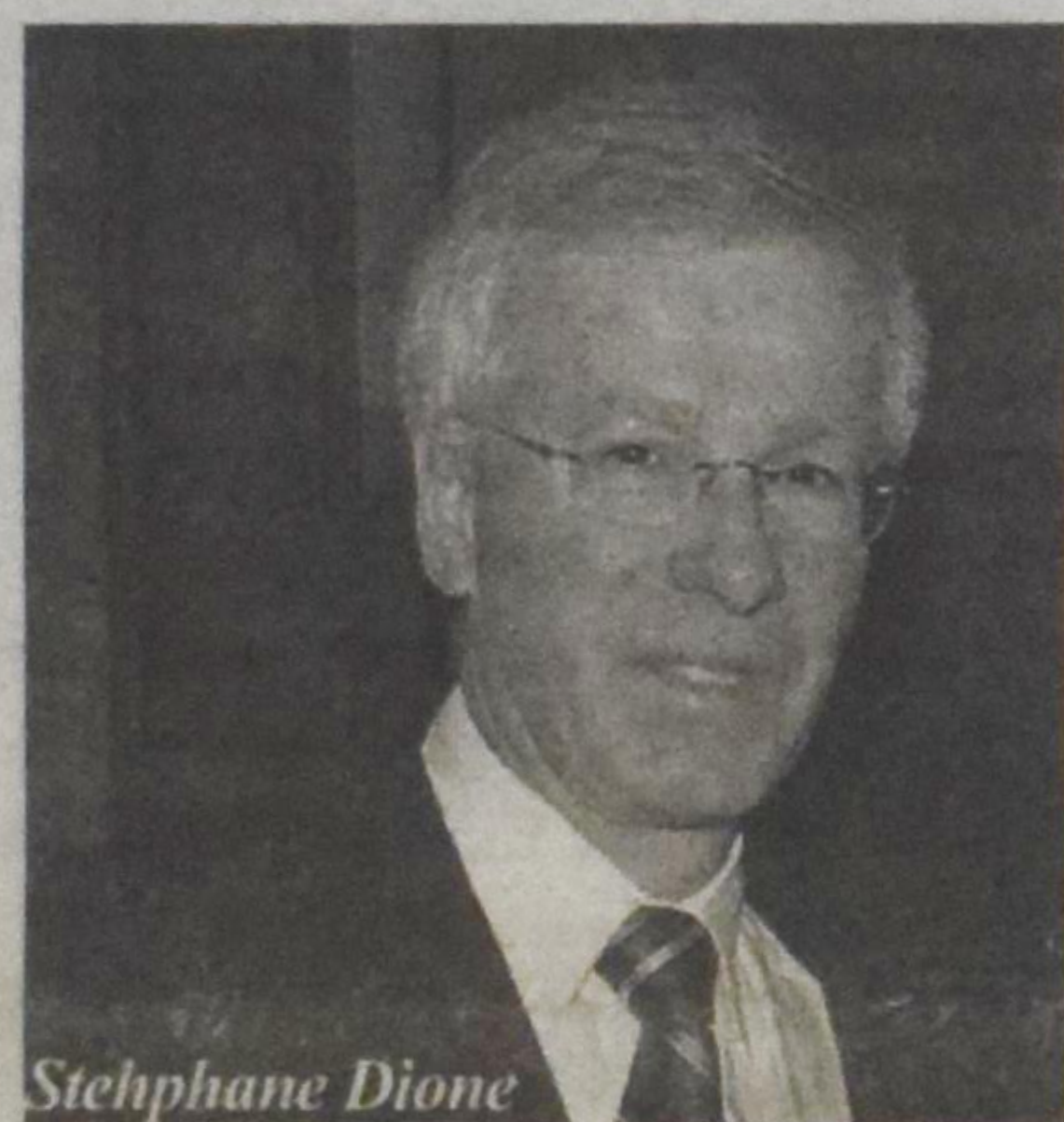
Harry der Nederlanden

Stéphane Dione's proposed carbon tax (or one like it), rejected by P.M. Stephen Harper as "insane", has been supported by the conservative magazine *The Economist* and by several industry leaders as the best way to address greenhouse gas emissions. It isn't just the obsession of environmentalists. But, of course, a great deal depends on the details and how such a program is administered.

Dion's timing may not have been the best, however, as his announcement of his green initiative comes at a time when the Canadian economy is losing its momentum and energy prices are shooting up. The pro argument is, naturally, that the revenue and pressure produced by the carbon tax will eventually produce alternative sources of energy and thus reduce the use and the costs of carbon-based fuels to us.

However, countries like the United Kingdom and Denmark imposed a carbon tax several years ago. In both countries the programs initially received wide public support – until the shoe started to pinch. Denmark lost part of its manufacturing industry, and in the U.K. citizens began to resist when they saw the threat of ever-increasing government control over their lives as carbon use was traced to the individual personal level. In both countries voters soon became disenchanted with the green initiative.

These are, to be sure, two different issues: whether the carbon tax really works to decrease emissions, or whether it can sustain public support in the long run. But the two questions are not unrelated. In a democratic country any program that cannot win wide



Stéphane Dion

public support will ultimately fail. Then, too, the programs become unpopular because, whatever the claims to the contrary, they do carry costs. If those costs are too high and a vibrant economy is crippled, this will hardly help the environmental cause. A country with a faltering economy will not only be able to do less to curb emissions, environmental issues

will also drop lower in terms of urgency among the voters. Priorities change in a hurry.

Dion's announcement of the Liberal green initiative followed close on the heels of announcements by the Ontario and Quebec governments that they would introduce a cap-and-trade program to reduce carbon emissions. B.C. has already taken steps to introduce such a program.

The carbon tax and the cap-and-trade system are the two most popular ways governments in the West have been trying to reduce emissions. The carbon tax simply charges carbon polluters a certain amount per ton, with the money going into the government coffers. The income is then presumably used to encourage the development of cleaner options.

In the cap-and-trade system, polluting industries can continue to pollute but they must pay for anything over a certain "cap". This money then goes, not to the government, but to those industries that have succeeded in reducing emissions below their "cap".

The cap-and-trade system sounds simple enough but it can become very complicated. It involves much more bureaucracy and also much greater potential for corruption. Inspectors need to set levels and ascertain compliance. And someone needs to decide who is to receive the credits paid by polluters.

Does an auto manufacturing plant that has become inefficient and which is failing, for example, deserve to receive credits just because it is polluting less as a result of shrinking production?

On the global scale, this is what happened to Russia under Kyoto. Much of its manufacturing collapsed shortly after the Kyoto goals were set. From the perspective of carbon emissions, a country whose economy collapses, shutting down much of its industry, is a success in terms of cutting down on greenhouse gasses. So Russia had oodles of credits coming to it through no special effort or discipline.

Dion's is not a cap-and-trade approach but a simple carbon tax. He would like to avoid the word "tax", for he argues that the Liberal plan will be "revenue neutral", that is, it will not add to the tax burden of Canadian citizens or corporations. Whatever amount is collected through this tax – and it

Carbon tax continued on p. 2

In Kenya's hotbed of postelection violence, a bishop sows seeds of peace

Scott Baldauf

Eldoret, Kenya – They came at 10 a.m. on Jan. 3 to Jane Wanjiku's land, just a day after the presidential election results were announced. More than 200 young men in red shorts, shouting tribal war cries, and carrying machetes and sticks, spears and torches, they forced Ms. Wanjiku out of her home before they burned it down.

But today, Wanjiku is back on her land, planting maize and

Kenya continued on p. 3



News

Papua: Muslim-Christian tensions on a knife edge

Elizabeth Kendal

International Crisis Group (ICG) has just released an informative and significant report on the escalating ethnic and religious tensions in Papua (eastern Indonesia).

As the report notes: "Indonesian Papua has seen periodic clashes between pro-independence supporters and government forces, but conflict between Muslim and Christian communities could also erupt unless rising tensions are effectively managed."

According to ICG, the key factors behind escalating sectarian tensions are "continuing Muslim migration from elsewhere in Indonesia; the emergence of new, exclusivist groups in both religious communities that have hardened the perception of the other as enemy; the lasting impact of the Maluku conflict; and the impact of developments outside Papua."

The ICG report gives detailed accounts of how changing ethnic and religious demographics in various towns have produced localised but threatening culture clashes. Violence has been only barely contained and tensions simmer just under the surface.

Concerning the "new, exclusivist groups in both religious communities," ICG says that the arrival in Papua over the last ten years of new "militant strands of both religions" is contributing to tensions. "On the Muslim side," they note, "Hizb ut-Tahrir and salafi Muslims are giving a harder edge to an Islam that until recently was . . . reasonably moderate." Then, "On the Christian side, neo-pentecostals and charismatics are promoting their own brand of exclusivist truth and see the expansion of Muslim daawa (religious outreach, dakwah in Indonesian spelling) as

their greatest challenge."

ICG is no doubt attempting to be fair, non-judgmental and politically correct by presenting these "exclusivist" and "militant" groups as moral equivalents. But this is unfair and unreasonable.

There is however a good deal of interesting information in the ICG report. While Salafists are mainly winning over the Javanese, the Hizb ut Tahrir (which preaches Islamic-Marxist revolution) and the Pentecostal God-wants-you-to-have-prosperity-and-power sects are winning over many poor, marginalised, disempowered indigenous Papuans, thus deepening the fractures within Papuan society which is largely mainline Protestant.

The ICG report also details the degree to which the conflict in Maluku spread to Papua.

"New popular [muslim] history"

One very disturbing element of the ICG report is the regular reference to the "new history" that has recently been "rediscovered by Muslim commentators". As ICG reports, "the subtext to the new popular history is that foreign missionaries were responsible for Christianisation of a Muslim land; that Christian colonialism proceeded to obliterate all traces of Islam; and that not just Papua Muslims but Indonesian Muslims more generally must redouble efforts to regain lost ground and exert the control that is rightfully theirs."

ICG does not challenge the Muslim commentators' "new popular history" or denounce it as revisionism. Rather ICG accepts it, describing Muslim acceptance of it as a "new awareness" or a "new understanding" of his-

tory. Clearly, if Muslim commentators say it, it must be true!

The same benefit-of-the-doubt courtesy is not, however, extended to Christians. For example: "Toward the end of the year, rumours began circulating in the Christian community that Laskar Jihad, the salafi militia that wreaked havoc in Maluku from 2000 to 2002, was conducting military training in a trans-migrant area known as Satuan Pemukiman (SP) 7 in Masmi, outside Manokwari, with the aim of fighting Christians who had opposed the mosque. The fears were calmed after it turned out that the young men involved, almost all of them migrants, were not Laskar Jihad at all but members of a non-political, non-religious martial arts organisation." This reporting would be fine except that the footnote reference cites as the source: "Crisis Group telephone interview, Muslim activist, Manokwari, May 2008."

ICG seems to have an anti-Christian bias which causes it to undermine and minimise Christian concerns and thereby de-legitimise Christian requests. It seems to accept as inevitable that Papua will become Muslim and regard as unreasonable that Christians would want to prevent that.

Despite these problems, the ICG report is both informative and important. Religious liberty advocates will understand just how incredibly serious the situations described are.

ICG forecasts that if Muslim v. Christian clashes do erupt, they will remain localised. I do not agree with that assessment. The jihadist groups, the pro-Indonesia militias and in particular the Indonesian military (TNI) are looking for an excuse to unleash violent repression and ethnic-religious cleansing. Any

violent local clash therefore has incendiary potential to convert simmering tension into burning terror across the region.

What about implementation of special autonomy law?

The most disappointing (and shameful) thing about the ICG report is that while ICG offers several recommendations for managing the situation, implementation of the Special Autonomy Law is not one of them! De-militarisation and the opening up of the region to visitors, journalists and human rights monitors are not amongst ICG's recommendations either.

ICG's recommendations include things such as ". . . ensure that Papua develops its own indigenous [Muslim] scholars and teachers able to interpret universal Islamic values in ways that are in harmony rather than conflict with customary traditions."

But it is naive to think there is such a thing as "universal Islamic values", and even more naive to think that Javanese Salafis would accept having indigenous Papuans "interpret" or customise orthodox, Qur'anic Islamic values so that they no longer conflict with customary (Melanesian, tribal, animist, Christian) traditions.

What Papua needs is openness and internationally-monitored full implementation of the Special Autonomy Law. And it needs it very soon, before it is simply too late and the momentum behind the genocide of Papua's Melanesian Christians is irreversible.

Elizabeth Kendal is WEA RLC Principal Researcher and Writer.

Carbon tax *continued from p. 1*

could be some 13 billion – will be subtracted from personal and corporate taxes. It's sole purpose is to encourage polluters to reduce and to embrace alternative forms of energy.

Since it targets those activities that emit carbon, it will push up the price of things like heating oil, coal-fueled power plants and natural gas. A prudent man, Dion has said he will not jack up the price of gasoline.

The Liberal plan, of course, recognizes that such a tax will be hard on some of the poorest segments of the population. An increase in the cost of heating oil, for instance, will hurt many who can ill afford it, including farm families. Heating bills will already be sky-high this winter without the additional tax. If the increases created by the market don't discourage people from burning more fuel, will an additional tax do it? Who are the people that can afford to buy high-efficiency furnaces? Who live in new, well-insulated homes? The poor? Of course not. It's the well-to-do who can afford to buy hybrid cars and pay the price of showing a small carbon footprint.

So although a carbon tax sounds simple, it becomes complicated when the government confronts the problem of softening the impact on the poor. That will require more government bureaucracy and administrative

costs. So it seems doubtful to me that after passing through the hands of the government the full amount of carbon taxes will come back in the form of other tax reductions.

David Suzuki says that putting a price on carbon "is one of the cheapest and most effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions." Canadians, he points out, pay about \$90 per ton to dump waste at a landfill, "but it costs nothing to dump thousands of tons of carbon into the atmosphere."

A good point. But will a carbon tax change consumer behavior enough to reduce Canada's carbon footprint? Don Martin of *The National Post* points out that in Norway, which introduced the tax in the early 1990s, the impact on consumer behavior has been rather modest. Still, it may put enough pressure on industry to make it look for less polluting options.

The tax, however, may also impose such a burden on certain high energy industries like mining, cement, forestry and smelting that they can no longer afford to operate in this country or that imports from abroad are cheaper. B.C. cement makers argue that the extra tax will make it cheaper to buy cement imported from Asia. The net effect will be to add to the amount of greenhouse

gasses going into the environment since the cement will come from places that pollute with impunity. Industry representatives are asking for measures that will enable them to clean up and to continue production in Canada. They also suggest that a carbon tax or tariff ought to be imposed on products from other countries that have lower standards.

More and more of our products are coming from China. According to CIBC World Markets, last year the increase in carbon emissions from China was equal to the total emissions from Canada. Creating conditions that will motivate high polluting industries to move to China defeats the very purpose of the carbon tax.

All of these complications don't mean that we shouldn't have such a tax. The impact of greenhouse gasses on our climate seems to be well documented. But we must go into such programs with wide open eyes. The claim that we can drastically cut emissions

without it costing us is a pipe dream. And it involves balancing many factors, economic and political, for such large scale actions tend to produce unintended consequences.

Both Liberals and Conservatives have said that greenhouse gasses and global warming are real threats. So when one party puts forward serious proposals addressing this threat, it is not enough to declare it "insane". Even in the framework of party politics there must be room for politicians to recognize that they are addressing a common problem and to come up with better suggestions.



News

Kenya *continued from p. 1*

beans – and, remarkably, surrounded by some of the same Kalenjin neighbors who chased her off because of her Kikuyu ethnicity. She and other Kikuyus, who supported Kikuyu candidates in December's elections, have now been welcomed back.



"This is my land," she says, walking into her hilltop farm, "and that is my house," – a charred mud-walled home. "I feel comfortable coming back," she says, blaming the national political leaders for the attacks. "They manipulate the people. If it was just between me and the locals, it would have been easier."

The peace deal mediated in February by former UN chief Kofi Annan certainly bought Kenya time to put the country back together. But the true test of lasting peace and reconciliation will be found here in the smaller rural communities of the Rift Valley, where much of the country's food is grown, and where most of the estimated 1,000 post-election murders took place.

Often, the hard work of rebuilding relationships starts with a simple seed distribution ceremony hosted by a Roman Catholic bishop.

"There is hope, but it is still a very alarming situation right now," says Jacqueline Klopp, a Kenya expert at Columbia University in New York. "The only alternative is to do what the bishop is doing in reconciling communities. But there needs to be a sustained effort. People need to build peace committees and learn lessons from what went wrong this time so that politicians don't do it again."

More than 400,000 still in camps

Out of the estimated 600,000 Kenyans who fled ethnic violence that followed the country's contested Dec. 27 elections, only around 180,000 have started to leave makeshift refugee camps and, and a smaller fraction, such as Wanjiku, have actually been welcomed home.

Tensions within the government – with the President Mwai Kibaki's party on one side and Prime Minister Raila Odinga's party on the other – could still push Kenya back to the brink of violence, and if those politicians who incited ethnic hatred are not punished, Klopp says, Kenya's days of machetes could return. "If there is not punishment for someone somewhere, then all the work the bishop and others are doing will be torn asunder."

Here in Eldoret – the center of Kenya's bread basket, and the fiery heart of the postelection violence – there wouldn't seem to be much common ground for communities to build on. Almost a quarter of the murders following the Dec. 27 election took place here, 35 of them in a single horrifying incident – the burning of a Pentecostal church crowded with women and children. Even today, nearly 20,000 people seek shelter in a camp at Eldoret's agricultural show ground, the largest concentration of displaced people in Kenya. Some, like Wanjiku and her sons, venture out every day to cultivate fields they fled, and return home to the camp at night. Many are terrified even to leave the showground at all.

Yet Cornelius Arap Korir, the Roman Catholic bishop of Eldoret, is starting to unite the two warring ethnic communities – Kalenjin and Kikuyu – through their common desire to grow the food that will help them rebuild their homes, their communities, and their lives.

On a recent morning, as part of an ongoing series of "seed

ceremonies," Bishop Korir hands out bags of maize seed and fertilizer to members of the Kikuyu community of Illula, encouraging them to return, and to the neighboring Kalenjin community of Kapsoya, encouraging them to allow the Kikuyus to return.

"It takes a long time," admits Bishop Korir, but the best way to get people together is development, he adds. "You make the project to be a peace project, like the season of planting. As they are planting, they are waiting, they are talking. The beginning was tough, but we keep on coming back, coming back."

Sampson Baibai, an elder from Kapsoya representing the Kalenjin community, says that the troubles started after the elections, when many Kalenjins expected opposition leader Raila Odinga to win and accused the Kikuyu community of cheating when it was announced that he had lost to President Mwai Kibaki.

"One community was annoyed at the other who stole the election, and so they directed their anger to the community who had stolen the election," says Mr. Baibai, as members of his community and of the Kikuyu community line up for seed. But after about a month, he and other elders began to talk across ethnic lines to stop the violence. "It took the initiative of the elders to talk to the young people and tell them that people have to live together as a community."

Elijah Ng'ang'a, a Kikuyu elder at the ceremony, says that his people had wanted to return to their farms for many weeks, "but every time they tried to come back, they were chased away. That's when we sat down and talked to them." He also credits the bishop's system of dispersing the seeds to farmers. "The seeds were being offered to both communities not just one – so that pulled people together – and that's when they calmed down and decided to be together," he says.

'It's possible to live together again'

This day's seed ceremony also serves as a reunion of sorts for two young men who haven't seen each other since the violence started.

"After the elections, the violence that erupted split us up," says John Kiptoo, a Kalenjin, smiling at Peter Ngunjiri, a childhood Kikuyu friend. "It's possible for us to live together [again]. We are blood brothers, we come from one country. I pray the principals [in Nairobi] will sit together and keep the peace going."

The December violence caught Mr. Ngunjiri by surprise. "It's something that came randomly," he recalls. "I thought I was in my place, in my house. In fact, where I'm staying was the battlefield for these two communities."

Now, Ngunjiri says the two communities are watching each other, buying from each other, playing with each other, their lives slowly going back to normal. "This is the process for the

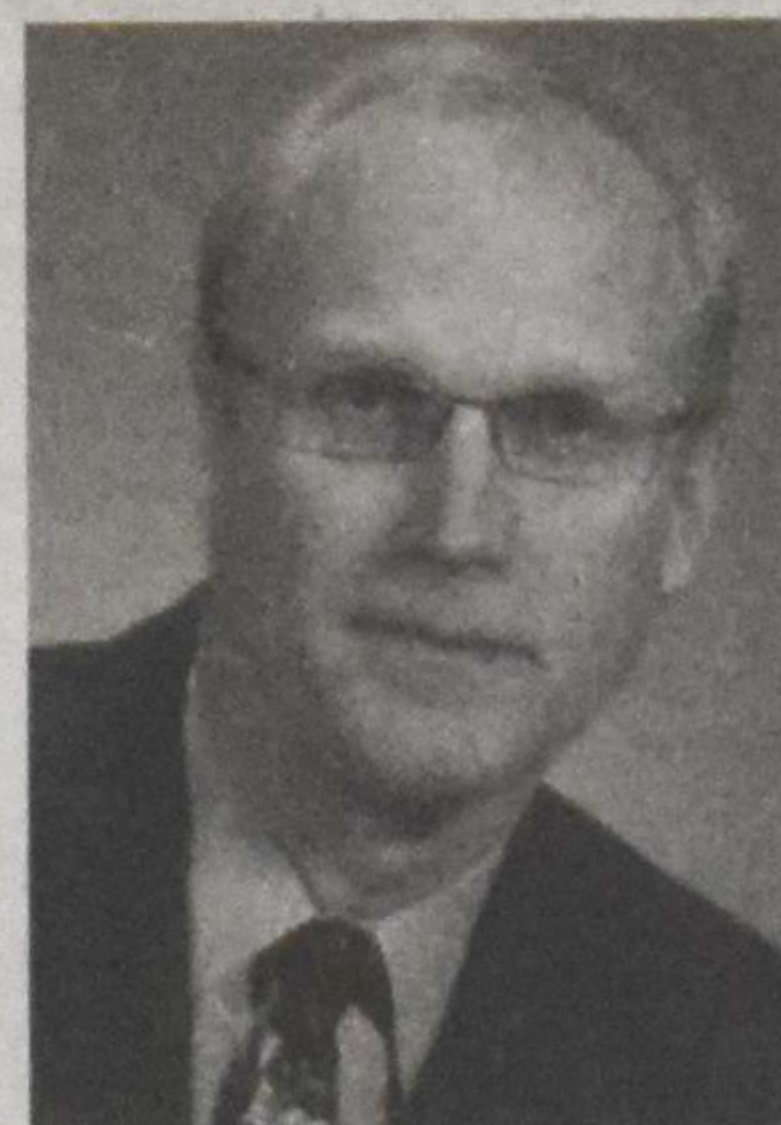


healing to take place. I can forgive them, they can forgive us – but to trust – it is something that is a process. But in time, I think people will be back here and will be back to the normal ways."

Peter and John exchange a brotherly hug and head back to the seed ceremony.

Scott Baldauf is a staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

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Synod

CRC Synod 2008



Marian Van Til

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – The annual general synod of the Christian Reformed Church meets this year from June 14-20 (just begun at the time of this writing). As nearly always, synod gathers at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

25 women delegates

For the first time in the 151-year history of the Christian Reformed Church, women are among the delegates to synod. Twenty-five of the 188 delegates to Synod 2008 are women. Synod 2007 removed the requirement that delegates to synod be male.

Some important Agenda items:

Possible changes to the 'Form of Subscription'

The 'Form of Subscription' is a statement that all officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church must sign, indicating their commitment to upholding and defending the creeds and confessions of the church, most significantly the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. The form is intended to keep everyone on the same page, confessionally speaking.

But in recent years some church leaders have complained that the form, written originally in the 17th century, is outdated and that its difficult text weakens its potential as a meaningful testimony for new church leaders. In some cases congregations are not even requiring new officebearers to sign the Form of Subscription.

So a previous synod appointed a committee to revise the form and send it to the churches for feedback. Using that feedback, the committee drafted a new version, called the "A Doctrinal Covenant for Officebearers in the Christian Reformed Church."

Synod 2008, however, decided that more work is needed to address a doctrinal issue of this magnitude. "This conversation gets to who we are as a denomination," said Rev. Kenneth Benjamins, Classis Hamilton. "We have varieties of practices, varieties of worship styles... one thing we cannot afford is a variety of creedal commitments." Synod said an expanded study of the issue would create an opportunity for sustained discussion of the creeds and confessions.

Delegates also debated the makeup of the new study

A personal overview of Synod 2008

Paul Vander Klay

The billing for this Synod, as was repeated sufficient times to make me feel uncomfortable, was that this was to be an historic synod. The importance ascribed to it was of course the first synod in which women elders and pastors were seated and Thea Leunk was elected to be the Vice-President. Those certainly were new things, but beyond that this synod was in my opinion mostly a maintenance synod. Reports were heard, numbers were reviewed, votes were taken, but no momentous decisions were made. Even the presence of women on the floor which attracted so much press seemed to me from the inside to be ordinary and regular. Having women vote instead of just speaking didn't suddenly create a new day within the CRC, it didn't herald new ground broken, it was the same CRC dealing with the same things we've dealt with before and will deal with again.

Now some might think that admitting this is a betrayal of some cause. If women are allowed to be seated and vote at Synod then ... (fill in your own tale of utopia or apocalypse). The truth was far more mundane, far more ordinary, far more real to the church. Women being delegates didn't "let them into" the church, they've always been here. Sure they've not been able to exert a particular form of influence by the long standing prohibition but their influence has always been with us. They have been part of the body from day one and this didn't change. From the floor discussions you could see that women seemed to be on both sides of most issues, just like the men were.

To say that this Synod was the "No News" Synod doesn't mean that it wasn't important. I think there were a number of important moments that might not be judged as "news-worthy".

What was probably more important than the fact that women were delegates was how those women entered into a potentially awkward situation. Despite some of the talk about tender consciences being violated and long toes that couldn't avoid being stepped upon I didn't see any situation of one side crowing about their victory or trying to rub the other side's face into their loss. At the same time whereas I assume there were a number of delegates who didn't agree with the seating of women, very little was heard from men in terms of protest and complaint. For the most part I think people decided to be generous, polite and courteous with each other and have a good time together. The best news

observation of the synod might be that nothing bad happened and for the most part people were charitable and gracious with each other, just as it should be.

Another moment that may not make the news was the appreciation expressed for our ministry associates. Rod won't tell you about this because it embarrasses him but that brief discussion and the expression of gratitude that followed late on Thursday evening was significant.

It was clear that none of the overtures regarding candidacy, alternative routes to the office of Minister of the Word and the office of Ministry Associate were going to make any headway. One of the quiet changes in the last few years is the growing presence of Ministry Associates as elder delegates on the floor of Synod. Whereas we had 2 article 7s (Minister of the Word/exceptional gifts), we had over 40 men and women enter the ministry under Article 23 (Ministry Associates). In many cases Ministry Associates like Rod Hugen do identical work as Ministers of the Word but without the recognition, the job security, the financial compensation or the honor due them. The offices are supposed to be "distinct in task but equal in honor" but many Ministry Associates are in fact "equal in task but distinct in honor". Ministers of the Word are paraded before synod to be honored. Ministry Associates are not, despite the centralization of that credential by last year's synod. A number of people spoke to this point and I think we saw a recognition by many that this is something that needs to change and I believe it will. After this discussion someone made the request that the Ministry Associates stand so that they can be recognized and prayed for, which they did, and synod gave them a standing ovation and a moving prayer. It was an important moment for many and hopefully a next step on the way to resolving some of our credentialing challenges our denomination faces.

There were of course many other things that happened both public and private at this synod. In speaking with first time elder delegates following the synod I heard what is often heard from them. "I really appreciated my experience here. I have a whole new picture of the church and a new optimism of what God is doing in the church and can do in the future."

Sometimes no news is good news, and I think in the case of this synod that is the case.

Paul Vander Klay is lead pastor at Living Stones CRC.

Christian Courier

Founded in 1945

An independent biweekly that seeks to:
report on significant events in the Christian community
and the world; express opinions infused by Scripture and
rooted in a Reformed perspective;
provide contact for the Christian community.

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Fax: (905) 682-8313; Web site: www.christiancourier.ca

Publications Mail Registration No. 09375

We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

Canada

committee, noting that the Form is misunderstood and under-utilized in some emerging and ethnic minority congregations. So at least two of the 11 committee members must be from ethnic congregations, and at least two from emerging churches. The committee is to report to the synods of 2009 and 2010, present the first draft of a new document to the churches by Jan. 1, 2010 and make a final report to Synod 2011.

Revisiting Contemporary Testimony

"Our World Belongs to God" has under-gone a revision, and that, too, is on Synod 2008's agenda. Commonly known as the Contemporary Testimony, it was written in 1986 as a modern expression of what the Christian Reformed Church believes. While not on a par with the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort, it is widely used by CRC churches.

But much has changed since 1986, so to remain

contemporary the testimony was deemed to need updating.

Synod 2008 did adopt the revision before it. Written in free-verse poetry, such as is used in the Psalms, the revised testimony contains much that was in the previous version. "We have tried to keep the tone of the original version and smooth some things out, but speak to contemporary issues," said Rev. Morris Greidanus, chair of the revision committee that was formed in 2005. Greidanus was one of the writers of the original contemporary testimony.

Although it refers to Scripture, the testimony is not written as a dogmatic text, Greidanus said. Rather, it contains Bible-based material that is in part a response to how the world was affected and changed by events such as the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Those events "made people feel a little shell-shocked and we wanted to reflect that," he said.

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Letters/News

Let us sing hymns

Singing in many, if not most, of our Reformed churches is no longer what it used to be. In our worship services the so-called praise-songs and choruses dominate the usual repertoire. That is a most regrettable trend. We, as well as our church councils, worship organizers and pastors should be alert to a trend of singing those imported songs and tunes. We better have a serious soul-search and help to reverse this dangerous slide.

The sentimental tunes and at times rousing rhythms are obviously borrowed from the modern "rock" world. The so-called "Third Wave" has become a powerful influence in the church so that traditional tunes are set aside for repetitive choruses and monotonous phrases.

It is time we reconsider and re-evaluate what is acceptable singing in our regular worship services. Traditionally the churches

would carefully select a body of songs acceptable for worship. Placed into an adequate hymnbook they were presented for approval by synod. At present the CRC congregations are supposed to sing from the grey hymnbook. I recall how synod with enthusiasm introduced and recommended it. With fervour and conviction we sang out our faith.

Hymns have a tendency to develop into valuable treasures of faith. After all, many hymns simply are confessions of faith. Singing them leads to learning, knowing and memorizing due to repeated usage. Many hymn lines stay with us till our dying days. People have died with a song on their lips. Personally we have experienced that singing hymns at a deathbed can bring comfort and peace.

Sadly I see our hymnbooks sitting unused

in forgotten silence in the pew-slots. Once these vocal volumes were used for singing, but now these books have become antiquated and useless. Soon they will end up in some dark closet and be completely ignored.

Are we still serious about what we sing in our services? After all repetitive choruses will not satisfy in the long run. Even some theology is questionable and the grammar unacceptable. By the predominant use of choruses and praise songs our younger generation is impoverished, rather than being spiritually enriched by good solid hymns. We have fallen prey to a trend of our time. So let us return to the rich heritage of good music and inspirational hymns. After all our western culture has left us with volumes of glorious, God-glorifying music.

George Hiemstra,
Whitby Ontario

More than 200 to cycle in Sea to Sea ride for the poor

June, 2008 — More than 200 cyclists are set to ride in what is projected to be the largest bike tour ever to cross North America.

The "Sea to Sea 2008 Bike Tour" is a nine-week trek across the United States and part of Canada, beginning June 30 in Seattle, Wash., and finishing in Jersey City, N.J. on Aug. 30. Of the 218 participants, 127 are set to bike the entire 3,881-mile distance while another 91 are riding for at least a two-week portion of the route.

Cycling to end poverty

Presented by the Christian Reformed Church, the tour provides a way to raise awareness and funds for people living in poverty in North America and around the world. Organizers have set a goal of raising \$1.5 million to help end the cycle of poverty by partnering with the Reformed Church in America and agencies like the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, Christian Reformed World Missions, and Partners Worldwide, funding programs in job creation, education, health services and more.

"Poverty is a big issue and it takes something big like this tour to draw attention to it," says Rev. Len Riemersma, a tour organizer from Willard, Ohio. "We serve a big God who is calling us to offer his hope to people in what often seems like hopeless situations."

A cycling enthusiast, Riemersma is one of three chaplains riding along with the group this summer providing pastoral care while enjoying a challenging adventure.

Also cycling the full distance is Claire Elgersma, who kick-started the planning of the "Sea to Sea" tour. She participated in a similar ride hosted by the CRC in 2005 that stretched almost 6,000 miles across Canada over 10 weeks.

"Biking across Canada was an amazing

experience for the church and also very life-changing for me," Elgersma says. "For 71 days, we were exposed to the elements and were totally dependent on God for his protection."

About this tour, she says: "An event like this is big enough and crazy enough to generate enormous enthusiasm around a cause. This tour is merely a vehicle to challenge groups and individuals to engage in serving the poor all over the world in some way."

Sea to Sea cyclists have committed to raising \$10,000 each, (other cyclists are raising \$4,000 each per stage). Donations to individual cyclists or to the tour in general can be made online at www.SeatoSea.org or by calling 1-888-CRC-BIKE.

Celebrating and working along the way Sea to Sea will feature 12 rallies in cities along the route where tour supporters and the public can gather with the riders to celebrate what God is doing through the tour to alleviate poverty. Most of these rallies occur on Sundays, when cyclists take a day off from riding.

The largest gathering is expected to take place in Grand Rapids at the 8,000-seat Fifth Third Ballpark. Grand Rapids is home to the headquarters of both the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America.

A unique aspect to this tour will be the opportunity for cyclists to volunteer at various agencies that work with the poor in cities along the route. The first of these takes place in Yakima, Wash., on July 3 where, after cycling 42 miles, a dozen or more cyclists will assist the Union Gospel Mission in serving a meal to the homeless and helping to give away furniture to those in need.



Two countries

Most of the participants are members of the Christian Reformed Church, a protestant, evangelical denomination with about 275,000 members in 1,000 churches in the United States and Canada. The church's bi-nationality prompted organizers to design a route that would include traveling through a part of Canada, passing through cities that were not including in the 2005 tour.

The CRC was established in 1857 in Holland, Michigan and celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2007. "Sea to Sea 2008 Bike Tour" builds on the celebrations of the past while continuing to look for opportunities to make a positive impact in the world for generations to come.

Paying Christian school tuition

In the May 12 edition of *Christian Courier* I read about a request for stories on how we raised money to put our children through Christian schools.

We were always firm believers in "stay at home moms" when the children were young, so on my husband's only, we were able with God's blessings to pay tuition for elementary Christian school for 16 years.

When the oldest of our three children entered Christian high school, our youngest entered grade one. So I had time on my hands then. I very much wanted to earn the money needed to pay for the high school.

First I tried house cleaning, but at that time it paid only \$2.00 and later \$3.00 per hour, so that did not get me anywhere. Then I became a lunchroom supervisor in a public school for several years. Later I was a crossing guard, also near a public school. I also did that work for several years.

I must admit that it gave me a lot of satisfaction that I was paid by the public school board (lunchroom supervisor) and later by the city (crossing guard) to earn the tuition fee for Christian high school.

We had our three children in Christian High for 10 years, because they are spaced in age. When the tuition was paid, I had money left over. Enough to take several wonderful trips with my husband throughout Europe and Western Canada.

Wilma Wikkerink
Hamilton, Ontario

Suggested reading

Although I was familiar with the Le Chambon story, Robert Marquand's article (CC 26 May 2008) contained a few details I didn't know. Readers unfamiliar with the story may want to read Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The story of the village of Le Chambon and how goodness happened there* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1979).

Bert den Boggende,
Brooks, AB

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Opinion

The Obama-Niebuhr connection

Paul Allen

Forget Jeremiah Wright, the Democratic hopeful owes much more of his worldview to the flinty-eyed perspective of a long-dead, Christian Harvard theologian

Earlier this month, Barack Obama talked about the hype surrounding him: "One thing I've learned about myself is that the surface glitter, the vanity element of this campaign, becomes less satisfying as I go along."

This may be false humility. But, it may also reveal a great deal about what Obama has read, understood and made his own: a moderate, Christian vision of things, a vision that tempers his view of himself, of human nature, of government. And this vision could

alter American liberalism itself.

Asked last year by the *Times*' David Brooks about whether he had read the work of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, Obama recalled Niebuhr from his days at Harvard as having a lasting influence. From Niebuhr, Obama gleaned that, "There's serious evil in the world, and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. I take away ... the sense we have to make these efforts knowing they are hard, and not swinging from naïve idealism to bitter realism." He then called Niebuhr his "favourite philosopher."

This was Obama's first "Niebuhr" moment. But who is Reinhold Niebuhr and what does

Obama's admiration of him imply?

A son of German immigrants, Reinhold Niebuhr was born in 1892 in Missouri. He served as a Lutheran pastor in Detroit, ministering to the families of autoworkers, seeing firsthand the hardships and drudgery of physically exhausting work. This experience led Niebuhr to blend faith with socialism, though more reluctantly than Canadian social gospel movement adherents like Tommy Douglas.

Niebuhr ultimately rejected liberal theology and the pacifism of the social gospel. He settled instead for "Christian realism," a political theology that was later credited with confronting Nazism.

Niebuhr saw societies as fundamentally alienated from God. He claimed that, "The nation is as much the servant of the Devil as the servant of God." Against the idolatry of the state, he doesn't mince words: "The nation is ethically ambiguous ... it belongs to the Devil precisely because it claims to be God."

Despite his socialism, Niebuhr's thought is at variance with the liberal narrative of human progress. He saw that human beings, while capable of selflessness on an individual level, are socially and politically selfish. This is why Obama's reliance on Niebuhr, fleeting though it may appear, is revealing. It means that Obama does not view his own spectacular success as a mark of human progress only. The extent to which he can communicate this belief is the extent to which Obama can identify with American society, which is skeptical of the liberal narrative of progress. Obama can meet the religious right halfway – on Christian terms, in his own Niebuhrian way.

The Religious Right has fallen from grace. The evangelical vote is set to implode this year, leaving the Republicans bereft of their base. And Obama is positioned to give the conservative idea of self-sacrifice a liberal moral meaning it has not held since John F. Kennedy. When Obama said last year that he would tell Americans, "Not what they wanted to hear, but what they needed to know," he was warming up an electorate for Niebuhr-like realism. But, can he sell self-sacrifice?

Maybe. Obama is miles ahead of previous Democratic nominees in forging a fundamental realignment in American politics. Thanks to Niebuhr, Obama has thought about the human condition, in terms of our shared nature and sin, categories that most liberals have rebuked since before the 1960s.

Obama's classical liberalism is in line with that of Martin Luther King Jr., a politics of human dignity not racial identity. He is even attracting traditional conservatives for this reason, a group known as "Obamacons."

Obama's liberalism is not that of the perennial separation of church and state. His liberalism is born of the public implications of Christian faith, a recognition of the moral limits of the state and the individual. And, the key to the presidency may lie in Obama's ability to talk about his favourite philosopher and communicate this bracing political theology to the conservative instincts of evangelicals and Catholics in swing states such as Ohio, Virginia and Michigan.

For example, Obama's admission a few weeks ago at a religious left forum that "there is a moral dimension to abortion" was a candid moment along precisely this path. It corroborates with what he wrote in his book *The Audacity of Hope*, that the pro-life position is both reasonable and appealing, despite the fact that he has remained pro-choice.

This concession effectively challenges pro-choice dogma. And for that reason, it will be seen as common sense to many of his youthful supporters, who are generally more troubled

See Obama on p. 9

Graham Morbey in the Intelligent City

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



Rev. Graham Morbey is transitioning from his position as the CRC campus minister at the Universities of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier, and I wanted to mark the occasion with a few words.

The story of Graham Morbey begins with his four brothers crisscrossing the continent with their parents before they each flew off to university. His father was with the navy, and Graham's youth was distributed through the cities of Victoria, Halifax, and Ottawa. His family attended Associated Gospel and Fellowship Baptist churches, and when Graham went to Carlton University, he decided to major in philosophy.

His philosophical explorations led him out of what he later called his fundamentalist upbringing and prompted him to sign up for a theological education at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. There, professors like Cornelius Van Til inspired him to go deeper and so he pursued further study at the Free University and the University of Amsterdam in Holland. He was in Europe 11 years, during which time he learned Dutch, studied the idea of European integration and met a Virginian named Mary-Leigh Smith, who became his wife and bore them three children.

They came back to North America and settled in St. Stephen's, New Brunswick, where Graham taught philosophy. But not for long. Graham heard a call to Calvin Seminary, where he completed some theological work. In the hallway he spotted an ad for a job at the Universities of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier in Ontario. Soon he met with Remke Kooistra and was offered the job. It was 1980 and he was thirty-nine.

I see God everywhere

Twenty-eight years later he is retiring from the position. While there is no way to sum up three decades of work, there are a few things that stand out in his tenure in the city that was declared to be "The World's Top Intelligent Community" in May, 2007.

First of all, Graham comes to his position with a deep Reformed vision. When asked about this, he sums it up in four words: "I see God everywhere." This is what has given Graham strength in the multitude of discussions that have weathered the campus through the decades.

"When it comes to issues," he says, "I don't just have a jumbled palette of experiences to draw from – I have a *view* to share. A Christian *view* of the world. That's why I left my fundamentalist beginnings."

Graham also named the Reformed wariness for idols as giving clarity to his work. "Idolatry is making one aspect of creation the centre," he said. Whether it's pleasure, alcohol, or ideology, it will inevitably withhold life from those who adore it.

Secondly, anyone who has met Graham immediately is aware of his playfulness. If you have heard Graham tell a story you will see a twinkle in his eye and expect some forthcoming ironic twist. One small example is his response to having his educational Jesus "peace poster" torn down from the campus hallway. He immediately went to the university "homophobia" web-site and copied the advice for combating homophobia to a second poster he put on the wall, except he substituted the word "homophobia" with "Christophobia." For an academy saturated with resentment against past Christian privilege, this is a playful way of making a point.

Research prayers

Graham's tenure will be memorable for many other things, too, like starting the first Habitat for Humanity university chapter in Canada with his colleague; for his leadership and fundraising for the Pascal "Faith and Science" Lectures; and for urging his university out of a secular hegemony into a multi-faith friendly paradigm.

One thing he is especially known for is his prayers. People have not only asked Graham specifically for his prayers on special occasions, but prayer has been a unique way in which Graham has engaged the university with a Christian worldview.

This is his very original idea: he asks a professor if he can pray for their research, and then gathers some students with him to hear about the work, asking questions about its difficulties and ethical issues. Then together they compose a carefully worded prayer that is printed, framed and offered to the professor. One psychology professor named Rudy does research on rats to deepen understanding of human addictions. The prayer was playfully entitled, "A Prayer for Rudy and his Rats."

When asked what the theme of his ministry has been, Graham quotes Romans: "for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation." He also said at a recent gathering: "My students have taught me very much through the years, lessons I needed, and to them, in their hundreds and hundreds and also to their friends and those who dropped by the offices or met along the way – a big Thank You."

If you are to ask Graham about retirement, he will reply: "I'm not retiring. I am moving into a full-time consultant position." If you want to consult Graham now, you will have to travel to Toronto where he and Mary-Leigh will continue to work and serve God with their many gifts.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.



Stewardship

At MIT, low-tech inventions with a high impact

The school's basement D-Lab exports simple solutions to the developing world.

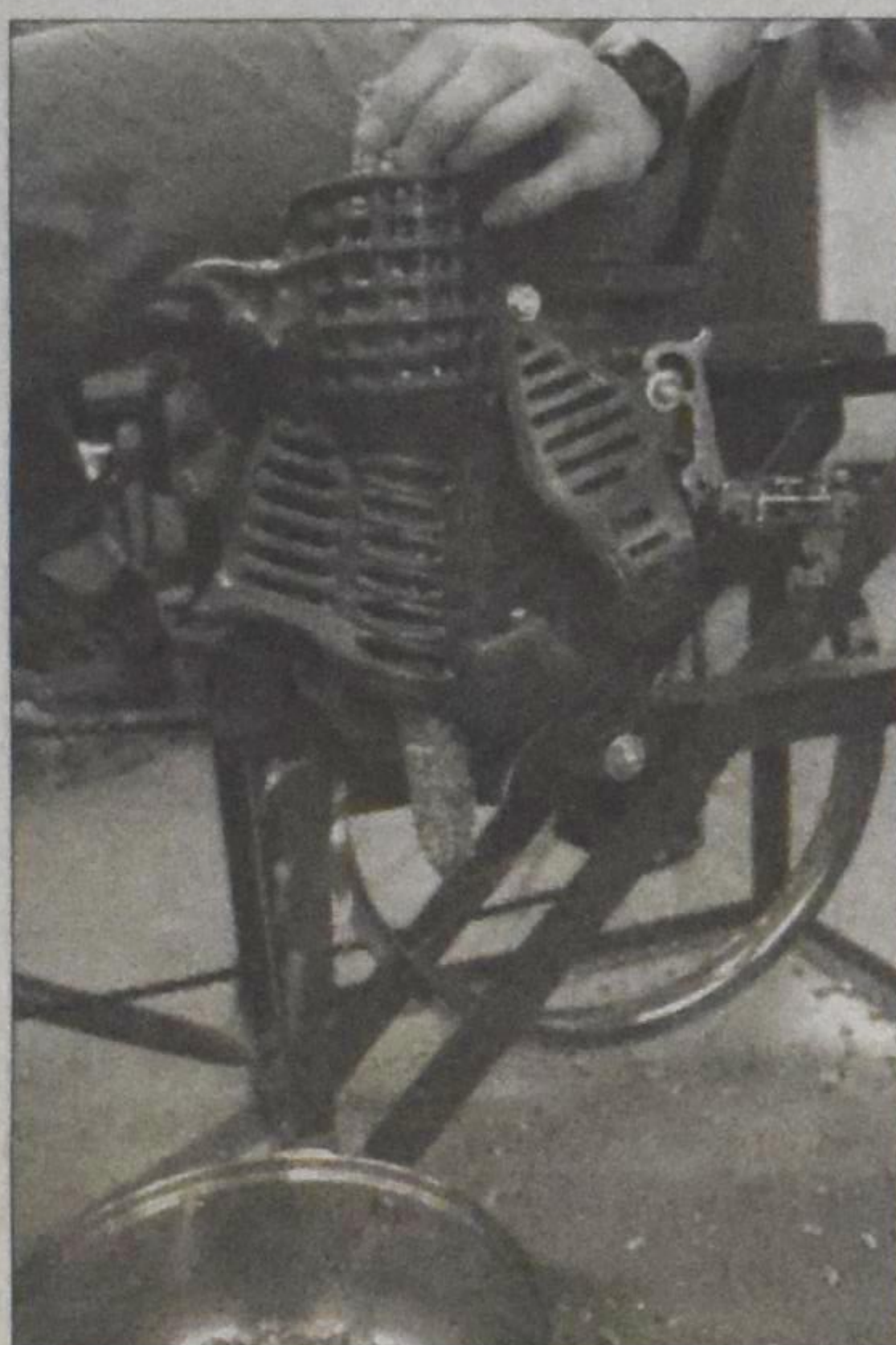
Vijaysree Venkatraman

Cambridge, Mass. – Amy Smith is not an easy person to track down. Even during the school year, this inventor and instructor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology hops over to remote African towns and Latin American villages.

When she is on campus, the best bet for finding Ms. Smith is in her basement laboratory – a cluttered workshop with a long whiteboard, exotic souvenirs, and basic tools – known as D-Lab.

Unlike most of MIT, Smith's workshop is far from cutting-edge. There are no next-gen computers, no vials of polysyllabic chemicals, no fancy equipment. The space is decidedly low-tech – and that's the point. D-Lab students pinpoint practical problems in the developing countries and then brainstorm and build solutions. Because the people they are trying to help are below the poverty line, the class's inventions must be simple, effective, and most important, inexpensive.

"What people need is usually completely different from what we imagine sitting here in America," says Jodie Wu, a mechanical engineering junior, whose group went on a school-sponsored trip to Tanzania over winter break. The idea for her current project – a mobile, pedal-powered corn sheller – came from a conversation with a Tanzanian bike mechanic.



Using bicycle parts and a corn husker, a person can put an ear of corn in the husker and pedal the cob through the husker removing the kernels into a container. The cob is then directed out the back of the husker allowing a user to continually feed ears through.

The D in D-Lab stands for three things – development, design, and dissemination – and each is the theme of a different semester-long class.

The first class travels to developing countries and identifies issues that the lab can tackle during the next term. For example, in heavily deforested countries, the students found an alternative to firewood.

The design class – often filled with different kids – takes on the practical engineering. Here they planned and built a charcoal-briquette maker, a metal press that can make clean-burning fuel out of agricultural waste. "It could be corncobs in Tibet and sugar-cane waste in Haiti," says Derek Brine, a teaching assistant.

The third phase takes the students' work and deploys it across the globe. "These classes are the ones I wish I could have taken during my time here [as a student]," says Smith, herself an MIT-trained mechanical engineer.

D-Lab forces students to set aside their high-tech training. "Though it appears like a step backward in terms of technology, you are moving forward because you learn to do more with less," says Ms. Wu.

This design process takes many rounds of revision. For instance, the briquettemaker was originally a foot-long piston. After many prototypes and field tests, the models got smaller and cheaper. The final six-centimeter-long version inspired a mantra for the D-Lab crew: "When you have to go to a tenth of the cost, reduce the material by 90 percent." Paring down certainly helped in this case – the tool, originally \$20, is now only \$2.

Smith has built her career on this style of practical solutions. In 2004, she won a MacArthur Fellowship – often called the "genius award" – for creative uses of simple technology to solve everyday problems in developing countries. Smith's early inventions grew out of her four years in Botswana, volunteering for the Peace Corps. Her electricity-free incubator – an icebox packed with phase-change pellets – keeps samples warm for 24 hours and is an integral part of inexpensive water-testing kits.

Smith's travel continues, but often with teams of students in tow. She has developed a growing, global network of community partners. Each summer, indigenous inventors from across the world come to a design summit hosted by D-Lab to exchange know-how and ideas. Clearly, D also stands for dialogue.

Within a decade, Smith has transformed this cramped basement into a wellspring of ingenious, low-cost inventions. In a sense, says engineering junior Kendra Johnson, Smith's best invention yet is the D-Lab itself.

Harvesting the sun

Next time you turn the key and your engine starts consider for a moment where the energy came from. Understand that the hydrocarbons that make up the gasoline that powers your engine was synthesized using the sun's energy eons ago! Yes, the sun! Almost all the energy we use today has its origin from the sun – even hydroelectricity. The only exceptions I can think of are nuclear energy or tidal energy (the gravitational pull of the moon – we've only begun to harness it).

With the surging price of oil and natural gas as world demand outstrips supply, we are all becoming more cognizant of the reality of dwindling reserves. We, the modern day prodigal sons, are finding out that our oil "purses" are becoming lighter every day! We dig deeper and exert more energy to extract the last drops of the sun that was harvested so long ago.

We are forced to consider finding and using energy sources that harness the sun's energy today – (maybe we can learn from the Amish?) Maybe "animal power" is a solution for some as are the healthy choices of "human powered energy" like walking and biking. However, most of us are hoping for alternatives that will allow us to keep our cars and run our energy consuming gadgets. Ethanol and bio-fuels are the current rage and lately we've seen the impact of using them; pitting poor people who cannot afford the higher cost for corn and cereal (rice, wheat, corn) grains against we Westerners who want to use the same materials to make bio-fuels to drive our cars. That competition for cereal crops has always been there – whether to use our crops fatten cattle or hogs to feed those who can afford to eat meat or feed those who eat the cereal crops directly (rice, bread, tortillas).

But there are other alternative ways to harvest the sun that may prove helpful rather than competing with our world's food production:

- Hydro – we already are very familiar with hydro-electricity – the sun lifting water and dropping it again and again in a cycle that keeps turbines turning.
- Wind-mills – again the heat of the sun developing low and high pressure areas that generate the winds that fill our sails and turn our windmills – an old technology renewed.
- Photoelectric arrays – imagine large swaths of desert land or building roofs covered with large photo-cell panels – generating electricity in the bright sun. Electricity that can also be harnessed to split water molecules into its base hydrogen and oxygen parts which can be used in engines to drive farm machinery, trucks, buses and cars. The genius of this is that desert land or roofs have limited alternative use – there is no competition with food production.
- Wave energy – related to wind energy but also connected to tidal energy (gravitational pull of the moon).
- Solar cookers – concentrating the sun's energy to superheat water to produce steam to

drive turbines – again, imagine those deserts covered with focused mirrors that super cook water to steam which is used in a closed cycle to drive a turbine to generate electricity.

- Digesters – processing manure from animals and harvesting methane that can be used to heat space or drive engines to generate electricity. Germany and Denmark lead the way. It has a welcome side effect of minimizing smell.

As faithful stewards of the earth that God has entrusted to us we need to look for sustainable choices that honour what the prophet Micah so eloquently proclaimed so many years ago: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

This is a criterion on which we will be judged: how we handle the energy crunch of today. We need to act justly when it comes to the demands we make. We cannot allow the poor to suffer, rather we must do the opposite – mitigate suffering. Let us be evermore conscious of the impact that our choices make as we harvest the sun; let us take the small steps as well as the big ones described above, such as taking your bike, walking or using mass transit services instead of your car whenever possible.

Stewardly tip: Keeping cool. Often we go overboard when the heat and humidity climbs and we set the thermostat too low. Even in a home with central air, it is possible to save energy by being selective as to how much various areas in our homes are cooled by adjusting or closing vents. As well, strategic use of fans, drawing blinds during the day and opening windows in the evening help to minimize heat load. Just some of the ways a steward can minimize energy consumption.

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Tight-fisted stewardship

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario
Rick's email: rickd@cssservices.ca



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Church

Algerian Christians found guilty of proselytizing Muslims

ISTANBUL (Compass Direct News) – An Algerian court gave four Christians suspended sentences and fines two weeks ago for seeking to convert Muslims to Christianity, a Protestant church leader said.

The case is one of several that have sparked local media and French government claims that Algeria is repressing its Christian minority, which numbers 10,000 according to conservative estimates. A former French colony, Algeria gained its independence in 1962.

A court in Tiaret city, 150 miles southwest of Algiers, gave Rachid Muhammad Seghir a six-month suspended sentence and a 200,000-dinar fine (\$3,350 Cdn). He was originally charged with “distributing documents to shake the faith of Muslims.”

Chabane Beikel, Abdelhak Rebeih and Djillali Saibi were each given two-month suspended sentences and 100,000-dinar fines (\$1,675 Cdn), according to Saibi. Two other men on trial, Mohamed Khene and Abdelkader Hori, were acquitted.

Under Ordinance 06-03, passed in February 2006, attempts to convert Muslims to another religion can be punished with up to five years imprisonment and a 1 million-dinar fine. The new law appears to contradict Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Algeria is a signatory, asserting that religious freedom includes the right to manifest one’s religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching.

“[We] call on the highest authorities of the state to put an end to the persecution that targets the Christian community, and to ensure its right to the free exercise of worship,” Mustapha Krim, president of the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA), said in a statement following the ruling.

In response to criticism, government officials have said that Christians are subject to the same legal restrictions as those imposed on Muslims in the Muslim-majority nation. They claimed last week that Protestant evangelists were seeking to divide Algeria by using conversions to create a new religious minority.

Conviction without evidence

Police detained the six defendants as they were leaving a prayer meeting at one of the men’s homes in Tiaret on May 9.

At their initial hearing on May 27, a state prosecutor raised additional charges that the men were holding an illegal religious meeting. He demanded two-year jail sentences and 500,000-dinar (US\$8,145) fines for each of the six.

Ordinance 06-03 also requires that non-Muslim religious services be held in government-approved locations intended exclusively for worship. Defense lawyer Khelloudja Khalfoun said that all six of her clients should have been freed because there was no evidence against them.

“Among these six, none was stopped in possession of a Christian book,” Khalfoun said, also noting that they were not preaching to Muslims when police detained them. But Larbi Drissi, a lawyer representing the Ministry of Religious Affairs, said that the ministry was satisfied with the verdict, Reuters reported.

“At the end of the day what we want is that people, irrespective of their religion, practice religion under the framework of the law,” the lawyer said.

Since February, at least 10 Protestants living in or visiting Tiaret have been detained or convicted on religious charges. Habiba Kouider, a female convert to Christianity, awaits a ruling in the Tiaret court on charges of illegally practicing her faith. Krim of the EPA said that police body-searched and interrogated her for two hours on June 1 in a public street in Tiaret.

At least half of the country’s 50 Protestant congregations have received closure orders, many of them based on Ordinance 06-03, according to Krim. Speaking on May 31 in response to criticism surrounding the court cases, Algeria’s top Islamic authority accused Christian evangelists of a “new form of colonization.”

“Their distant political goal is to create a Christian minority,” Abu Amran Chikh of the Higher Islamic Council told daily El Khabar. “Moreover, the evangelist movement is characterized by a secret activity that violates the Koran and the Sunna in one way or another.”

Iranian Christian arrested without charges

Eight policemen take house-church leader from his Tehran home

ISTANBUL (Compass Direct News) – Iran has continued a wave of arrests against Christians, among them recently a Tehran house church leader who was previously held and tortured for his Christian faith.

Eight policemen arrested Mohsen Namvar, 44, from his Tehran home on May 31, refusing to provide any reason for his arrest. The officers confiscated a number of the Christian’s personal belongings including his computer, printer, CDs, books and money. His location remains unknown.

An Iranian pastor residing outside the country said that Namvar had anticipated that police would come for him. “I know that if they decide to kill me as a martyr, you will care for my wife and my children,” the father of two told the Iranian pastor last month.

Acquaintances warned Namvar that he had been implicated during police interrogations of Christians in the city of Amol in April, the pastor residing abroad said. That month officials had detained several Christians in Amol, 80 miles northeast of Tehran, releasing them over the following weeks.

Expected to betray other believers

Treatment of Christians in jail follows a customary pattern, the pastor said: Authorities put them in jail for a few weeks and beat them in an attempt to get information about other converts.

Police had previously detained and tortured



Tehran underground shops

Namvar for baptizing Muslim converts to Christianity. The Christian was unable to walk for several months after police repeatedly applied electrical shocks to his back in the spring of 2007.

“You must not evangelize Muslims, you must not have meetings in your home,” the police officers who tortured him told him, according to the pastor residing outside of Iran. “They even said, ‘If you continue to do this, we will kill you.’”

Under Iran’s strict Islamic laws, it is illegal to proselytize Muslims, and any Muslim who converts from Islam to another religion can be executed. A draft law before the re-elected Iranian parliament would make the death penalty mandatory for “apostates” who leave Islam.

Under the past three decades of Iran’s Islamist regime, hundreds of citizens who have left Islam and become Christians have been arrested for weeks or months, held in unknown locations and subjected to psychological and physical torture.

When released on bail, they remain under threat of criminal prosecution if they dare to worship in house churches or become involved in any Christian activities.

American Islamic textbook teaches it’s ok to kill non-Muslims

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (CBNNews.com) – A U.S. federal investigation released this month reveals that some Islamic textbooks being used in the U.S. are teaching kids it’s okay to kill adulterers and converts from Islam.

The books have been used by the Islamic Saudi Academy in Virginia, which teaches 900 students in grades K-12 at two campuses in Alexandria and Fairfax. The school receives much of its funding from the Saudi government.

Passages in the textbooks state that “the Jews conspired against Islam and its people” and that Muslims are permitted to take the lives and property of those deemed “polytheists.” Christians are included as “polytheists” because of a misinterpretation of God as Trinity.

The academy has come under scrutiny from critics who allege that it is teaching an intolerant brand of Islam.

Last year, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a panel formed by Congress, recommended the school be shut down out of concern it promoted violence. “We feel more confident that the potential problems we flagged before really are there,” said the commission’s spokeswoman, Judith Ingram, after the content of textbooks were reviewed.

In the review, the panel recommended that the school make all of its textbooks available to the State Department so changes can be made before the next school year.

School officials acknowledged that some of the Saudi textbooks contain harsh language. They say the texts have improved and are revised as needed by

the academy before being distributed to students.

Troubling passages remain

The commission said the texts did appear to contain numerous revisions, including pages that were removed or passages that were whited out. But numerous troubling passages remained, the panel said. Some of those passages include:

- › The authors of a 12th-grade text on Koranic interpretation state that it is permissible to kill apostates (those who convert from Islam), adulterers and people who murder Muslims.
- › The authors of a 12th-grade text on monotheism write that “(m)ajor polytheism makes blood and wealth permissible,” meaning that a Muslim can take with impunity the life and property of someone believed guilty of polytheism. According to the panel, the strict Saudi interpretation of polytheism includes Shiite and Sufi Muslims as well as Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists.
- › A social studies text offers the view that Jews were responsible for the split between Sunni and Shiite Muslims: “The cause of the discord: The Jews conspired against Islam and its people. A sly, wicked person who sinfully and deceitfully professed Islam infiltrated (the Muslims).”

More generally, the panel found that the academy textbooks hold the view that the Muslim world was strong when united under a single caliph, the Arabic language and the Sunni creed. The textbooks also hold that Muslims have grown weak because of foreign influence and internal divisions.

Church

CRC Synod 2008 *continued from p. 4*

Protestant Church of the Netherlands

Another item on this year's agenda is the relationship between the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the newly formed Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PCN). When the PCN was formed, it enfolded the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, also known as the GKN (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland), the church that has often been called the mother or sister of the CRC in North America.

In recent decades the CRC has had a strained relationship with the GKN. The two denominations were distanced by differences about biblical interpretation and acceptance of homosexual practice. However, with the formation of the PCN, that mother church no longer exists, and the CRC Interchurch Relations Committee would like synod to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with the new denomination, in line with the approach of the CRC's new ecumenical charter.

That new charter, adopted by Synod 2006, takes a less confessional approach to interchurch relations. It marks a shift from having stressed shared confessions and mutual discipline between denominations with whom the CRC was in "ecclesiastical fellowship" to cooperation with a broad array of denominations despite theological and other differences with those churches.

'Not a church that shares our confessions'

After hours of debate over two days, synod concluded that since the PCN is in effect a new denomination, the relationship that the CRC had with the old GKN no longer applies. Synod directed the Interchurch Relations Committee to "attempt to develop a mutually acceptable process to work with the PCN towards a long-term relationship between the CRC and the PCN and report the progress to synod annually."

Some delegates had argued for a close, formal link with the PCN, while others said that the CRC should not be linked too closely with the new denomination.

"The PCN is not a church that shares our confessions. We're not being honest. We're fooling ourselves if we think that it does," said Rev. Pieter Sinia from Classis B.C. North-West. He said the PCN has pastors whose view of Scripture is faulty, and others who are professed.

Tobias Lewis, an elder from Classis Atlantic Northeast, said that he, too, is troubled by the PCN's stance on issues such as the ordination of practicing homosexuals. But he said it is important to try to restore a relationship between the CRC and the PCN.

The IRC was asked to see if it could come up with a relationship that is not full ecclesiastical fellowship but is more than what is referred to as "churches in dialogue."

The motion that passed comes out of a desire of the CRC "to develop and maintain a relationship with the PCN that ... does not obscure the seriousness of the issues that led to restrictions being placed on the GKN prior to formation of the PCN - issues that appear to continue today in the PCN," says the IRC's recommendation.

Too political, too fast - or needed now?

Some delegates said that the revised testimony contains some statements that seem more political than biblical. In response, Greidanus said the testimony is in line with statements and decisions made by previous synods. "... We tried to stay strictly to what synod has said," he told the delegates. "We never go beyond what synod has said confessionally."

Rev. Raymond Blacketer from Classis Alberta North said he found the revision to be worthwhile, but he wanted synod to table it for a year so that people in the churches would have more time to review it. Tobias Lewis, an elder from Classis Georgetown, asked why there should be a rush to adopt a document that has some political overtones to it. "We haven't had time to pore over this with our hearts and souls," he said.

But other delegates said that it is important to get the document in the hands of church members so they can use it to help explain the Reformed faith to new believers, who are eager to know about the faith but have little background in the historic confessions of the CRC.

"As we plan and lead worship services, the Contemporary Testimony can serve us well," said Rev. Joy Engelsman from Classis Rocky Mountain. "It can help us speak to things that are of concern to people in our congregations today."

The remainder of Synod 2008's important decisions will be covered in the next CC.

Marian Van Til

CRC in Nigeria helps broker peace agreement

TAKUM, Nigeria (CRCNA) - A 2006 peace agreement, brokered with help from the Christian Reformed Church in North America, continues to help bring stability and hope to the tribal people living in Takum, Nigeria, African church leaders say.

"We can now move around Takum better. There are dividends to the people and there are improvements that we can see," said Rev. Tsojon Ykubu, general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria.

At the same time, conflict continues between ethnic groups in Takum, which is in Central Nigeria. As a result, continued work at maintaining peace and working toward reconciliation is necessary, said the Nigerian church leaders, who were in Grand Rapids, Mich., during Synod 2008 (June 14-20).

"We need to take one step at a time. The church is still trying to help bring about peace," said Rev. IraRiman Mathias, general secretary of the Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria.

A peace and reconciliation committee, of which both churches are members, continues to meet to work with tribal leaders to deal with problems as they arise. "The issues are political. They are about who is in leadership. The latest crisis was the result of a conflict over farm land," said Mathias. The Takum peace agreement ended a violent land dispute among ethnic groups that destabilized communities

in Nigeria, displaced thousands of families and caused starvation and death throughout parts of the West African country.

Process began eight years ago

Peter VanderMeulen, director of the CRC's Office of Social Justice, and Richard Van Houten, general secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, helped to start peace negotiations in 2000. Crucial in helping to forge a peace agreement was including community leaders from all over the Takum area in the discussions, said Van Houten. "It has been complex. There are so many different facets that play into this," he said.

Van Houten joined the Nigeria church officials at the CRC's office in Grand Rapids during the CRCNA's synod gathering to give an update on the peace process. The peace process has also touched the two churches whose leaders attended Synod 2008. The RCCN broke from CRCN in the 1970s, but now they are working together in many ways.

"Our churches came together as the result of a series of meetings. We have become almost one church. We are doing everything together," said Rev. Mathias.

The Christian Reformed Church in North America has had a presence in Nigeria for more than 80 years. Several CRC agencies, including the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee and Christian Reformed World Missions, are working there.

Southern Baptists confront prevailing 'lostness'

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky (Christian Post) - Ending their annual meeting June 10-11 on an encouraging yet challenging note, Southern Baptists were called to make their impact on "the lostness that remains" around the world. "And that lostness is massive," said International Mission Board (IMB) president Jerry Rankin.



"What about the next generation?" Rankin asked. "Will we nurture in our children and grandchildren God's heart for missions, or will they simply emulate the self-centered indifference of our generation? We are seeing God stir in the children, young people and students of today a passion for missions and [a desire] to make a difference in our world," he said.

Rankin urged Southern Baptists to "go tell the world love has come" and to "go tell the story of Jesus" as he passionately presented the annual report of the Southern Baptist's international mission agency.

Southern Baptist churches are supporters of one of the largest mission efforts in the world. Since a "New Directions" initiative launched in 1997, Southern Baptist churches have sent more than 7,300 missionaries to the field. Working closely with

national partners, Rankin said those missionaries have seen baptisms double from 308,000 in 1997 to more than 609,900 in 2007. Numbers of new church starts also jumped dramatically, from 3,352 in 1997 to more than 25,000 last year.

Needed at home too

While aiming to advance the Gospel even further across the globe, Southern Baptists are also focusing on evangelism at home in North America. Geoff Hammond, president of North American Mission Board (NAMB), challenged the Southern Baptists to share the Gospel to every person in North America by the year 2020. "Just like a GPS device gets people to their destinations, NAMB's GPS will help Southern Baptists reach their destination, which is every believer sharing, every person hearing by 2020," Hammond said.

The initiative is called "God's Plan for Sharing" and can be contextualized to any mission field. It encourages Southern Baptists to pray, engage in witnessing, sow the Gospel and ultimately see a harvest of people responding to the Gospel. The evangelism effort is accompanied by a media campaign in which television, radio, print and Internet ads will tell millions who Southern Baptists are.

The Obama Niebuhr connection *continued from p. 6*

by abortion than their parents' generation. Such candid talk can only win him long-term respect. Obama knows that liberalism cannot thrive on an ever-expanding laundry list of human rights and victimhood.

Obama relies on a theological worldview to guide him. This is guidance, we now know, that comes through his reading of Niebuhr, who was an American, Christian, socialist, traditionalist, realist sage of human nature. So, Obama has a choice to make: Come out

swinging against the moral perils of greed, aggression, laziness and vice that threaten American culture and its economy, or play liberal politics as usual and risk losing an election in the swing states, an election that is his to lose.

If Obama chooses moral pugna-city over politics as usual, it will be his decisive Niebuhr moment.

Paul Allen is a professor of theology at Concordia University.

Nature



Biological pest control: a tragedy for tadpoles

If you read organic gardening literature you will find testimonials like these: "I don't spray chemicals; I just let the good bugs eat the bad bugs." "If we quit interfering with nature, it would balance itself out in the end."

After World War II ended, necessity led many Europeans to a different practice: they took shampoos with DDT to get rid of lice. Biological control wasn't an option for them. They couldn't wait for a band of baboons to come and do the grooming and lice-cracking. Tick-birds and oxpeckers don't live in Europe, either; besides they cause other problems.

Still, there is something very satisfying about seeing mosquitoes or cutworms or flies or midges controlled by birds, amphibians or other insects. One is tempted to believe that a "balance of nature" exists somewhere, somehow, with just the creatures that we humans appreciate being the survivors.

If only we had a world without mosquitoes, without houseflies, without blackflies... but filled with beautiful monarch butterflies, cecropia moths, and diaphanously-winged damsel flies.

But it's not so easy. I recall reading long ago about a decline in eastern brook trout populations in New Jersey's hills. After much study, it came down to this: mosquito control goofed up the insect interactions so much that eventually the resulting-mix-up of aquatic insect life affected fish miles away – upstream! – from any spraying. Want brook trout in your stream? You need blackflies and mosquitoes, among other insects.

Many times we can be short-sighted in these matters. We knock down barn swallow nests because they "make a mess" and then spray RAID or use mosquito coils in our yards. When one of my neighbours inherited a huge colony of cliff swallows, which make mud nests on the sides of buildings, he inherited muddy walls, guano, and clogged screens. Other people might have knocked down the nests until the birds went elsewhere. This neighbour, however, put up small wooden ledges to protect windows and screens from swallow house-making and excrement. Although his property was a working dairy farm with ponds and marshes nearby, the hundred or more swallows made

sitting on the deck virtually a mosquito-free experience.

My wife and I have a pond where before there was a swampy part of a hayfield. We were hoping, among other things, that the pond would become home to countless varieties of ducks, shorebirds, animals, and maybe even fish (if we "planted" it with cutthroat trout). When visitors come, they often say, "What is the pond for?" or "Do you have fish in it?" or "How many ducks are on the pond?" Our answer is, "We just like a pond." To tell the truth it hasn't become a waterfowl destination-of-choice so far.

Our pond has produced some interesting sightings, especially a hooded merganser sitting on a fence post on the edge of the pond. But mostly it has produced... well, insects. Water striders skate across the surface endlessly. Water beetles and water boatmen appear later in the summer.

In the spring the pond produces zillions of... mosquitoes. They perform endless intricate flight paths as if in training for some Bug Olympic synchronized flying contest. So many mosquitoes that it makes one creepy even watching. And our swallows – the fifteen pair of tree swallows, one pair of violet-green swallows, and two pairs of barn swallows – seemingly make no dent in the population.

"What is the pond for?" produces this answer: "It's a mosquito refuge, I guess." When we brave the bugs, however, and look closely we find that our bug-haven does produce some of its own controls. Scads of toads lay eggs in the pond; this year a zillion frogs showed up from somewhere (last year there were very few) and regularly *plop* into the water as we dawdle along the shore.

"There's a frog!" I exclaim as if I had just seen an African lion.

My wife says, "Where?"

"In the water," I cleverly reply.

And indeed, the frog was in the water suspending himself. (I decided to name the frog *Froggie*, which seemed consistent with a cat named Cat and two roosters each named Rooster. I suspected it was a "he-frog" because the swimsuit looked a lot like a Speedo.



And he had a racing stripe through his eye.)

Betsey spotted Froggie, too, and the hundred or two mosquitoes flying just above the water's edge. Froggie saw them, too, and when one tapped the water edge – laying eggs, perhaps – he somehow jumped forward and gobbled down the skeeter. No rolled up tongue flying out like a party toy. Just a quick lunge and the mosquito was gone. We cheered as if it had been the winning goal of the Stanley Cup. Ah... biological control is the way to go.

Of course, Froggie didn't eat the other 3.8 trillion mosquitoes humming along just over the water's surface. But maybe his offspring (or Toad's) did. There are so many tadpoles in the pond that at times they make a black stain. And they're lots of fun for visiting kids to catch and temporarily imprison. And they grow into toads and frogs, I suppose. Those that survive.

Last night we discovered that, while we may not have herons or fish to eat tadpoles, we do have a major tadpole enemy in our pond. I called Betsey over and said, "Look at that: a dragonfly nymph." It must have been about three-fourths of an inch long and floated through the water like the Enterprise on patrol in outer space. Every once in a while it flexed its (rear?) end and rose to the surface – I guess

it got air or something.

So we are watching this nymph that would grow up to be a flying mosquito-killing dragonfly some day when it struck... a tadpole. Within a few minutes we saw three tadpoles get killed by dragonfly nymphs. Why the nymphs weren't eating mosquito larvae is not mine to say; perhaps they were, for appetizers before tadpole sushi.

But which is the bad bug and which the good? I like frogs and toads and don't like mosquitoes. Do I want a "balance of nature" that grants me comfort, ease, and warm feelings? Right there, in our pond, and on our farms, we watch biological pest control. And it is not always pretty.

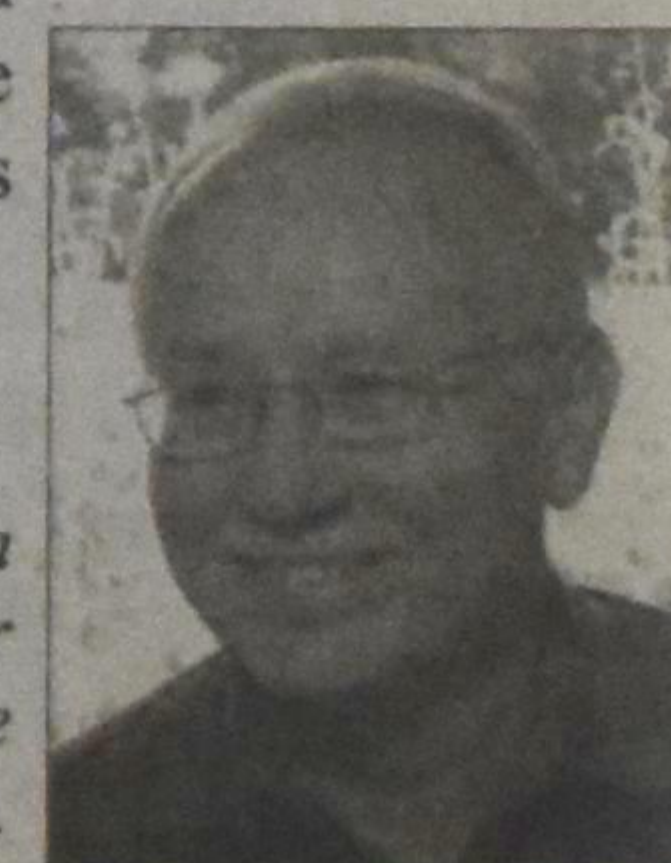
And what's God's will in these matters? I admit I don't know. I still think banning DDT was a good thing except in certain places where malarial mosquitoes (or head lice) need a temporary multi-megaton control. I don't think that mosquitoes are evil, or the result of sin, either.

I am impressed by the complexity of natural systems, distressed by the uniformity of the life systems in suburbs, cities, and heavily-chemicalized farms. But whether the "jungle" that exists in a pasture, a pond, or any relatively natural place is something that exists solely to produce awe, or whether it is an example of nature groaning (Romans 8)... well, about that I am presently agnostic. I just don't know.

P.S.: I was thinking about what I did or didn't say in this column while driving through Telkwa, a tiny burg on the Bulkley River. Just before crossing the bridge I noticed a raven, a rather dishevelled raven (probably in the moult), but a very *large* dishevelled raven with a fledgling robin in his beak. One gulp and the struggling songbird was gone. Elijah, I thought, help me. Is this the sort of creature who brought you food, or is it or is it a fallen descendant? Were *your* ravens living glimpses of a restored creation? I still don't know.

Note: The large photo comes from looking at Google Images and using the subject "dragonfly nymphs." The photo of a B.C. wood frog, with racing stripe, comes from <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/frogwatch/whoswho/factshts/woodfrog.htm> or you can type wood frogs, central British Columbia in Google Images and find this photo and more.

Curt Gesch is a retired school teacher who will un-retire in the fall, the Lord willing.



Gardening

METAMORPHOSIS

Worming its way

along a snaking grape vine,
its muted greens and grays
only half protect it
from the deadly pestilence
of sharp eyed birds
seeking to destroy
a juicy larva inching its way
to whatever is beyond.

Deep inside a rumbling begins.

It tastes the wretch of death.
Cocooned in golden chrysalis,
all begins to die, change, morph
caterpillar DNA liquefying
into shapeless mass,
dying to all it knows,
becoming something other
than what it's always been.

Strange appendages sprout,
fine and delicate,
in colors never comprehended.
It bursts from mummified remains
flitting on new found wings
tickling the flowering vines
dancing on sunlit breezes,
diving in, sipping sweet nectar,
shouting gratitude to worlds beyond.

Bobbing, weaving, pollinating
bringing life to all it touches,
it cheers the plodding ones
encased in tangled vines
inviting, enticing, crying out
it distracts the hungry birds,
exhorting the creeping crawlers
to touch their calling,
to find new life in dying.

Rodney Hugen

Gardening for dummies

Some people have a gift for gardening. Plants simply burgeon under their care. These artisans express their creativity in the colors and diversity of plants and flowers. They find therapy in working the soil, planting seeds and watching new life spring out of the earth. I am not one of them. Oh, I like the *idea* of gardening. And I appreciate the net result of gardening, whether it's the fresh fruit and vegetables my father-in-law produces so abundantly, or the beauty of a well-tended flower garden. But the reality of the work involved – the hours of bending, stretching, stooping, hauling water, yanking weeds and getting dirt under my fingernails – holds little appeal.

I'm just not a gardener. Truth be told, last summer I got confused and mercilessly eradicated the Sweet Williams my neighbor had given me while tenderly nurturing the weeds next to them. Then one day I recognized the imposters for what they were (St. John's Wort) from the mug shot in our Weeds of Ontario book.

Still, what's a farmhouse without a few flowerbeds? So I make the best of my limited ability. Over the years I've learned a few enormously helpful strategies which I'm only too happy to share. First of all, if you're not overly keen on gardening, don't over commit. Better to have small, well-kept flowerbeds than massive ones that can quickly take on a life of their own and end up looking like some bio-experiment gone bad. Secondly, perennials are your friends. They don't have to be purchased and planted every year like annuals and can usually endure at least some of the late spring frosts so common in Ontario. That eliminates the need to cover them up or drag them indoors every night.

Third, there's no such thing as too much mulch. A good layer of wood chips or cedar shavings holds in moisture, suppresses weeds and looks nice. Besides, the smell of it always takes me back to track & field days in school. And finally, for those of us who are horticulturally challenged, it's crucial to know which plants die hard. Roses, for instance, with their constant demands to be pruned, pampered, dusted and fertilized, should be avoided by people like me.

Along with the flowers, there are memories growing in my gardens. Take geraniums, for example. Twenty years ago, when we first built this house, a friend of ours stood on the doorstep with a housewarming gift: three of the healthiest, most colorful geranium plants I had ever seen. Now I'm not exaggerating when I tell you that this man had a degree in horticulture and his very own little greenhouse. He had grown this trio himself. I gratefully accepted his kind gift and planted them behind the house, where I hoped that someday we would have a real flowerbed. But at that point the area was backfilled with mostly subsoil from the excavations for the house. It was a drought year. Who knew they needed water every day? Within a couple of weeks the once thriving geraniums were withered sticks, their dehydrated leaves rattling in the hot dry wind.

Then our friend phoned one day to ask if he could drop by in the afternoon. I panicked as I looked at the victims of my neglect. For a moment I considered zipping into the Co-op to pick up some replacements, but he would see through the ruse. So I

jerked the skeletons out of the dirt and buried the evidence deep in the dumpster. I hoped he wouldn't notice the geraniums were missing in action. Thankfully he never mentioned them.

Every spring since then I buy a half dozen geraniums and plant them around the house. Perhaps it's some kind of penance for my sordid past. Or maybe it's just to prove that I can actually keep geraniums alive through the whole summer and well into the fall.

Beside the front porch I have a huge patch of lilies-of-the-valley. They perfume our patio for a couple of weeks every May. I have to rip half the patch back every year so it won't take over the whole bed. It's hard for me to believe it all started with just a handful of plants I pulled out of my mother-in-law's yard. A similar patch grew beside my own mother's front step when I was a kid. I would always bring her a bouquet, but I picked the stems so short she only had one tiny vase that would accommodate. Nevertheless, she proudly set it on the living room coffee table and that marvelous fragrance filled the room. The little crystal vase stands in my living room today.

We have lilacs, peonies, violets and hostas all with their own stories. And there are flowers planted just because they're pretty – crocuses, tulips, daffodils for the spring; an assortment of lilies for summer, and this year, a variety of perennials given to me last fall by my daughter-in-law, Willene, who is a much better gardener than I'll ever be. (Apparently she doesn't know about my history as a geranium killer.)

Not all the gorgeous flowers are on the farm yard. Down by the creek a cluster of irises pops up every year. They got dumped there with some soil from an old flowerbed when we re-did the back gardens. Beneath a stand of maple trees that divides our fields there's a lonely gold and red tulip that blooms each spring. I've thought of digging up the bulb and bringing it to the house, but its peculiar location reminds me to "bloom where you're planted" whenever I pass by.

The ditch along the side road is host to a flourishing batch of dame's rocket, also known as mother-of-the-evening. Now considered a weed, the plants were originally brought here as an old-fashioned ornamental by the Europeans. I can see the colorful streak of lavender, purple and white blooms from my back door. Often the evening breeze wafts their heavy scent up to the yard, beckoning me to go for a walk. It's an invitation I seldom ignore.

Strolling around the farm with Rocky at sunset after a long hot day makes me think of what it must have been like for Adam and Eve to walk through the Garden with God in the cool of the day. In the last book of the Narnia Chronicles, C.S. Lewis describes heaven as a June morning that never fades. I wouldn't be surprised if he's right. On the other hand, it could very well be more like a June evening, only amplified. We will experience colors, scents, sounds, flavors and textures as yet unknown to us. There won't be any weeds there, or night frosts, or pesky aphids. Just a musical wind that blows softly and carries the voice of God himself, as he whispers to each one of us, "Welcome to my garden." And I can only imagine what the geraniums there will look like.

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Ascension

With gifts for our human comfort

Abraham Kuiper

Translated by Jack van Meggelen

*When you ascended on high,
you led captives in your train;
you received gifts from men,
even from the rebellious—
that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.
Psalm 68:18*

For a strong demonstration of power and its execution, one has to be close to the centre of power. Kings cannot rule their country from afar, from an isolated hamlet or far away village. They have to reside in their royal palace and be present in the assembly of their councillors. They must occupy the throne from where they issue commands and rule their subjects with proclamations and decrees.

Similarly the captain of an ocean liner must stand strategically on the bridge, not somewhere in the bowels of the ship.

Again, as an enemy approaches, a general places his command post strategically near the front of the army to direct them in battle; he cannot hide in a remote fortress.

What we have said about the throne, or captain's bridge, or a general's quarters applies to any situation of power and command. To command the whole one has to be positioned strategically in the centre.

Thus, when we reflect seriously on the implications of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ as comfort for our soul, we must ask, "Where is the centre of the spiritual order of the world?"

Is the earth ruled from heaven, or is heaven ruled from the earth? Or, are they possibly like two ships passing in the night? In faith we respond, that heaven and earth are both ruled by the providence and counsel of God. *His throne* is in heaven, and all events taking place on earth are directed from there. In heaven all the lines that control events on earth are drawn together. The Word goes out and determines the course of history. You will not find the seat of government that determines the fate of heaven and earth anywhere here below. It is only found in the realm of eternal light and the abode of all majesty and splendour.

Once this is clearly understood, we can address the second question, "Was the authority of that government handed over to Jesus or not?"

This question also can have only one answer. Indeed, all power in heaven and on earth was given to Christ Jesus. He was given a name above all names, so that at his name every knee should bow. "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." [Ps. 2:6. KJV]

The Father has handed all things over to the Son, and so he must reign as King. "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" [Psalm 110:1].

To him is given all authority. It was transferred to him by the Father. He was anointed for that purpose. Because of the promise God had made, Christ received the crown as reward for his labours. Because our Mediator was appointed King, he also needed to be revealed as King. The title alone was



not enough. It could not just remain a promise; real exercise of power was necessary.

Heaven and earth were both waiting for him to ascend to the throne, anticipating his word of power and the unveiling of his majesty. This is one more reason why the Mediator had to ascend to heaven. He could not remain on earth. The heavenly throne of glory was the only place in all creation where he could reside as divinely appointed King. If the authority of government was his, and the seat of government was in heaven, then he could not remain at a distance, but must hurry to be there and assume his rightful place on the throne. So, the ascension of our Lord is none other than an acceptance of his sovereign rule, and ascent to his heavenly palace, where he is ruling in splendour and glory. Regardless of his greatness, he could not have ruled the world from Jerusalem nor the heavens from any place on earth. The lines of authority were gathered not on earth but in heaven and from there he had to rule. He did not ascend to leave us behind in poverty, but rather to come nearer to us all as King of heaven and earth. As long as he remained on earth he was able to comfort but a few; only from heaven could he reach out and bless all.

The ascension of the Lord did not occur through the hidden entry way of death, but triumphantly into the eternal glory of heaven. Yet it was not a radiant public event that would blind the eyes of the world, for even in nearby

Jerusalem no one noticed this glorious event. Likewise the Roman Emperor did not appear to have noticed it anymore than the people living along the Tigris and Euphrates. They all went on living as if the power over the whole world still belonged to earthly rulers. Only his church witnessed the stately splendour of his ascent. His church, represented on the Mount of Olives by the disciples, witnessed his royal entry into glory. They saw him fully alive and visible when he departed. They also saw the angels sent to comfort Jesus' friends. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." [Acts 1:11]. Then a cloud hid him from their sight.

But no more than ten days later they were once again reminded of his existence when he, fully in charge and ruling from heaven, used his authority to send the Holy Spirit.

The apostles who witnessed his ascent told the story of his splendid ascension to their disciples in turn. The church listened to the story and passed it on in writing. Today we still know of this event from God's Word, the Bible.

So, each year the faithful gather to remember the drama of his glorious ascension. The church uses the occasion to reflect on their King Jesus. It also sees him once again ascending to his royal throne in heaven. It is a celebration of life and joy in his royal power.

There is more to this splendor.

The ascent to heaven was not only a glorious moment for the apostles; it also was a moment of sacred joy for the heavenly hosts.

Many centuries before, the Holy Spirit had inspired this song,

"Lift up your heads, O you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty —
he is the King of glory."

[Ps 24: 9,10] (1)

Thus, in heaven above there was also an expectation of the returning king. The heavens were concerned about earth. The angels longed to see the mysteries of salvation [1 Peter 1:11-13]. They had welcomed our Mediator in the fields of Ephrathah, when he had left heaven behind; they had served him in the desert after the temptation of Satan; they had supported him in Gethsemane when he nearly succumbed; they had rolled away the stone so he could arise from the tomb; and now at his ascension they came to meet him. They went so far to meet him that those in the front lines were able to talk to the apostles. It is as if they received the Saviour from among the apostles and were taking him back with them to the very heaven, from which he had once come. The heavens to which he must return were ready for him, and waited for the manifestation of his glory. Once he had assumed the rule of heaven those in heaven too would rejoice over the fulfilment of the promise, and the realization of a most sacred hope.

Now he was becoming the king over Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; also over Moses and Joshua; David and Solomon; over all the witnesses and martyrs of God, as well as the seers and prophets.

Even so, that great day of God Almighty had not yet come, the day when Christ will judge all humanity, when "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." [Rev 11:14]. But this event was a wonderful anticipation of that day. When Christ entered heaven joyful songs of the

Blooming

heavenly host rang through all the heavens.

Jesus ascended as a *human being*. To be sure he remained the only begotten Son of the Father and of one substance with the Father. But he did not ascend in his divine nature, because his divine nature is already omnipresent; it did not go from place to place, and did not ascend to heaven, because it had never left heaven.

So, Jesus ascended as a man who had assumed our flesh and blood, which he had received in Mary's womb. The human being seen by the disciples as he ascended to heaven kept the very form that Mary had known from the day he was born. It was the same form in which he appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and to John on Patmos. This was the form seen by Stephen and when he returns on the clouds, all will see him in that form [Acts 7:56].

That is a mystery.

In Paradise God gave dominion over the whole earth to human beings. But due to sin we lost that role of glory. Human power diminished and faded. The one who should have ruled became a slave to the mire of our egoistical passion and arrogance.

But what happened then?

Now, on the Mount of Olives, another human being, a second Adam, has recovered the dominion lost in the garden of Eden. And because of the work he accomplished he has been given dominion once again, not just over Eden and over the animals of the field, but a royal dominion over heaven and earth, and also over seraphim and cherubim. Even Satan and his hosts can make no move against his will.

But for whose benefit is this royal dominion that belongs to the man Jesus Christ?

The answer is: for all humanity!

The heavens are prepared, and angels don't need to be sanctified. The final judgement of the Last Day may be immediate for those who have departed in the Lord. Even the fate of Satan and his hosts is already determined. The only reason why the Lord still tarries is for us, for human beings. The fact that the Kingdom of Christ cannot yet be handed over to the Father, but remains in Jesus hands through all these centuries is to make sure that *no one will miss out*.

The Lord said that he was going to perform a mighty deed in heaven for, "I am going there to prepare a place for you" [John 14:2b NIV]. Not in the sense that he has to fix up a building for us, nor was it meant only for the apostles who heard him. The purpose of Christ's reign in heaven is not for the sake of the angels, but in order to prepare a place for all people called by the Father. Once a place has been prepared for the last of his people, Christ's reign will be concluded, as determined by the Father.

More than any other word, the word *comfort* sums up the depth of meaning of the ascension of our Lord.

He ascended to heaven with gifts for our comfort. (2)

This does not mean that Jesus takes note of every sadness of our soul, to send comfort for that sadness. Of course our Mediator does that too, for he is rich in all kinds of comforts. But the deeper meaning of the text applies to the gifts of comfort which are designed to bring all human beings to live with him. Our Mediator hurries to relieve the needs of his people on earth, but he gives much more!

The gifts of comfort given by our Mediator relate to the grand and finished work of Christ who from his abode on high, governs all things in such a way that one person after another is uprooted from the mire of sin and unbelief and transplanted to the courts of the Lord where they grow like the oaks of righteousness or like palms and cedars.

Comfort is needed to relieve sorrow. The greatest and richest comfort must also be powerful enough to relieve our

Blooming among thorns and thistles



My spouse chuckles when I am pondering something. I tell him "my life is a work of art and I need to look at it from all angles." But his eyes light up when I tell him I am busy with "what is happening in Africa." On the other hand, I probably nudge myself to see life in a bigger perspective because in our early married years we lived in the Caribbean as CUSO volunteers (Canadian equivalent to the Peace Corps in the United States) and I do not want to get stuck in the North American mindset.

And so, during the last few weeks I have been thinking a lot about Sophia Pedro. I may have written about her some years ago. I am not sure. But she is an amazing woman.

During these weeks, I also have been reading the B.C. Without Borders series in one of our local newspapers on Sundays by Elaine O'Connor, a reporter with *The Province*, who is on assignment in Africa.

In addition to thinking about Sophia and reading Elaine's reports, I also made a point of re-reading a specific chapter in the book "Hope in Hell," which is about the experiences of medical personnel working with Doctors Without Borders.

I don't indulge in this material to obsess about the endless needs of the developing world, but I want to give my life a much broader perspective rather than simply conforming to the North American status quo.

When I think of Sophie, age 26, I am amazed at her incredible stamina and strength when she fled her village and climbed into a tree to escape the devastating flood in Mozambique. On the fourth day she gave birth to a baby girl in the treetop while the waters were steadily swirling underneath. After the birth, a medic was winched down from a rescue helicopter to cut the newborn's umbilical chord and airlifted Sophia and her newborn child as well

greatest sorrow. And our deepest sorrow is not due to some pain or loss or disappointment. *Our greatest sorrow is due to the bitter loss of our whole person and our entire soul into eternal death.* So also our greatest comfort is that our Mediator removes us from the path of destruction and provides for the salvation of our soul from death unto eternal life. You, who would have suffered in eternal death, have been saved by him. He has taken you to himself, so that you may now be counted among those who, with all the angels, will

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

as several other family members to safety.

In terms of the B.C. Without Borders series, I admire and respect those individuals who 'give up the comforts of home' for several years, tackling challenges with families whose lives have been shaken by war, natural disasters and disease and help them find hope and courage in a world full of cruelty and loss.

And I chose to read the chapter in the book "Hope in Hell" titled "New Fridge Syndrome" as a reminder of how easily we can acquire a 'small town mentality' in an acquisitive society. The writer in this chapter addresses the challenges some medical staff have, processing their experiences when they come back to the affluent North American society.

They usually have so much on their mind and in their heart when they arrive home. But when they begin to talk about what happened and what they saw, they are often met with 'Wow...really? Did I tell you we got a new refrigerator?'

I ponder all of the above. Plus, in my case it helps that I keep any article worth saving. The other day I was sorting through a pile of newspaper clippings and there I find an article written by Bert Witvoet, published in the C.C. November 19, 2007 titled "Face to face with your egoism." As I re-read it I grin wryly.

In a nutshell, Witvoet writes, living with the poor (or the vulnerable – in my case) allows us to become more aware of our own *egoism, anguish and fears*. He then quotes Jean Vanier – the well-known founder of the L'Arche communities who provides homes for the disabled – who writes in his recent memoir *Our Life Together*: "the poor (or the vulnerable) call us continually to go farther in our love and in the bonds that unite us and this going farther ends up *testing our resolve*. Are we capable of making the required sacrifices? Or should we stay at a safe distance and resort to feel-good charity?"

At that moment, I knew what my decision would be. Yes, I would add more hours to caring for my fragile mother beginning in the summer as well as day care a second grandchild in the fall. I do not know how it all will work out, or for how long I will be able to do this, but no matter how many "thorns and thistles" might be in the way, I believe I can bloom wherever I am planted. And I am sure...my sisters in Africa with their abominable spirit would see my challenge as a piece of cake!

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca



sing eternally in heaven before God's throne.

1. Dutch: *The LORD of heavenly hosts* (vs 10) and thus it implies clearly a triumphal entry into heaven, see ASV which has "Jehovah of hosts" – Kuyper used the words from the Dutch Psalter – JVM.
2. Dutch Psalter uses the word "for our comfort" in relation to the gifts mentioned in Ps 68, stanza 9. See also Ps. 68: 20-27, and Eph. 4:7,8, JVM.

Corinthians

Everything in its time

*But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits;
then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

1 Corinthians 15:23

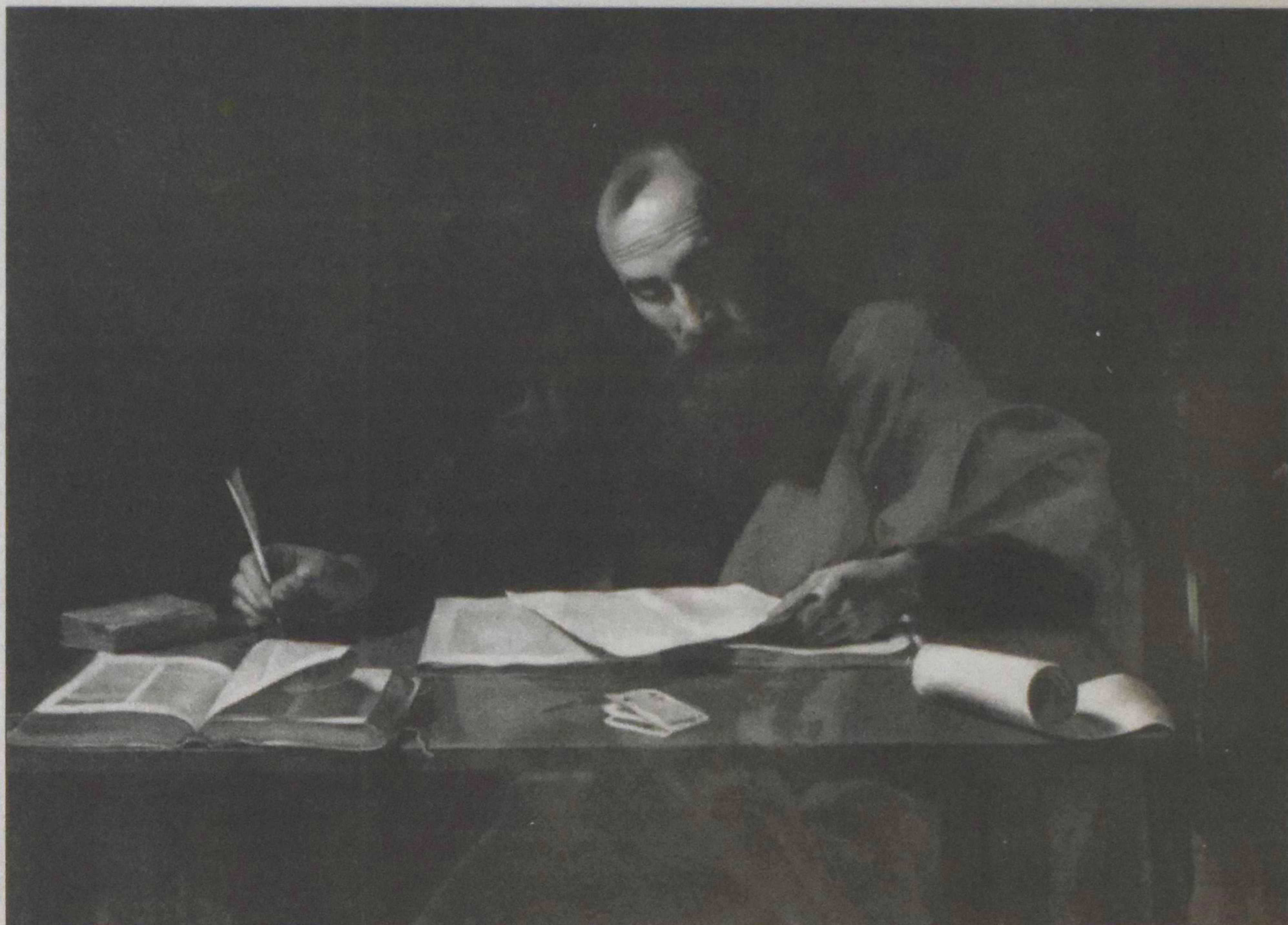
A. A. van Ruler

In the preceding verse Paul spoke in very universal terms: "so in Christ all will be made alive." But then he immediately makes distinctions. The Lord doesn't do everything at the same time. He is engaged in the awesome work of giving life. To rescue his creation and his creatures from death and from the abyss of corruption is God's primary work. He displayed this all-conquering power once and for all in Christ's resurrection. But it isn't God's intention that this be the only instance. For God, it is not ultimately about Christ and his resurrection, but about us and the world and bringing us to life.

In this, God does not do everything at the same time. Each of us is made alive in his own turn where he has been placed by the will of God. First Christ. He is the firstfruit. And then those who belong to him. But this doesn't happen until his return at the end of days.

Why this is so, Paul doesn't say. He only speaks of "turns", of a sequential order. The Lord has divided his redeeming work into parts, phases and groups. This he has done according to his own good pleasure. We may, of course, try to fit the Lord God into our charts and reflect on why he did things in this way and not otherwise. There are plenty of grounds to do this, for the will of God isn't without wisdom, and the enlightened human mind is called to study the depths of God too.

So there is certainly wisdom in the fact that the process by which we are made alive is composed so that it seems to divide into the resurrection of Christ in the past, on the one hand, and our own resurrection in the future, on the other. This deep wisdom must, among other things, be sought in the fact that those who are to be made alive in Christ must first be born. In any case, this division in God's work makes room for the whole of world history. Things do not end with Christ and his cross and his resurrection. On the contrary, in many ways this is only the beginning. The Lord God



Painting by Valentin de Boulogne circa 1600 entitled 'Saint Paul writing his Epistles.'

still has much in store. He has demonstrated his life-giving power in one man, but on the last day he will demonstrate it in a very different way.

We must not rebel against this. Now and again we become impatient. We don't want to see this life-giving, saving power limited to Christ's resurrection. We would like to see it streaming over every sphere of reality. But God has not yet come this far with his world. He is still at work. He is still waiting. We must develop a taste for this posture of waiting. Only then will we be ready to wait with him and to remain in our own group.

Paul's words, thus, testify to a very sober view of reality on his part. He does not slip into fantastic visions. Fantastic visions circulated in the church in Paul's day — such as the idea that for those in Christ death is a thing of the past; they will not die but have already entered into the resurrection life. There is, of course, some truth to this idea. In faith we are oriented toward the risen Christ, bound to him and in fellowship with him. So in a certain sense we participate in eternal life. But this is true in faith and still concealed by death. The visible victory over death for us must wait for the future of Jesus Christ.

We must therefore be very careful in our speculations on the life to come. We transgress the boundaries of our time, of the group to which we belong by virtue of God's will, if we think that immediately after we die we will fully participate in the eternal life of the resurrection. We will, to be sure, participate in it one day. And we already participate in it in faith, hope and love. Even on this side of the grave we are already saved. But then why shouldn't we also be saved on the other side? Still, the real, full life, the resurrection from the dead, will not happen until Christ's return.

This means that in both life and in death in a fundamental way we continue to walk within mystery. The resurrection is the true, the great revelation and unriddling of all being. But it is beyond our reach. It is located on the other side of life and death in the final day.

Only then will all tears be wiped from our eyes and only then will we see how good God has been in all being — and still is. We must not impatiently reach out for that day. But we must be busy with it. And even now we can receive a huge amount of light regarding the riddles of humanity and of this world, of life and death. We are not imprisoned in a night of utter darkness.

But we must remain in our turn, in our time. We must not act as though we have already received all light, the same light that the risen Christ has already received.

The words "in his own turn" could be translated by "in his own group". God has divided all things into groups. One group is Christ himself as the firstfruit. A second group is those of us who belong to Christ. In other words, the Lord God deals in terms of groups, and we receive salvation as part of a group, in fellowship with others. We must not want to break out of this fellowship. We must remain in solidarity with all others of our group and wait till God completes his great work of giving us life. We are not saved as isolated individuals but only along with others.

There's still more behind this — namely, that there are not just two: God and the individual; but there is also a third: the world.

This is God's world. It too must be liberated and saved. The Kingdom of glory does not just consist of isolated persons, but of the totality of created and glorified reality. Nothing less than God's honor and glory is at stake.

Therefore our destiny is bound up with the final destiny of the world. Only when the Lord has come to that point with the whole world when he reveals it in the eternal sunshine of his glory — only then has he come to the point where he can complete the divine life-giving power in those who are Christ's and fully free them from the powers of corruption. Because God loves the world, he cannot definitively redeem us any earlier.

So we too must respect this world which belongs to God. Only then will we be fully prepared to remain in our group and also in the grip of death as long as this is necessary.

Hotel on the Mt. of Olives

*The mount where Jesus ascended to heaven
While his disciples gazed with awe
And angels spoke to them
Of his return
Where Ezekiel saw visions
Of dry bones coming to life
Where Jesus often went to be alone
Or talked with his disciples
Where he began his descent into Jerusalem
Where he wept over the city
Imagine staying on this mount
Unable to fully take in
The momentousness of the events
That had taken place here
I ate and drank
Socialized and bartered for goods
As if it was any place
What would it have taken?
An overnight in the garden?
To hear the rustle of holiness in the Olive trees
To feel compelled to take off my sandals
To sleep with one ear cocked
One eye open
For his return?*

Linda Siebenga

Reflections

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

My husband, Ed, and I have been having a running discussion that arose out of a sermon we heard last week. Perhaps we've been talking about it because it relates to my state of mind, or rather, my state of spirit this last week, which I would call "disquieted."

Our discussion took off from the pastor's mention of "positive attitude." Ed commented that a Christian *always* has a "positive attitude" in that we know that Christ has triumphed, that "we are more than conquerors" through him, and that he will some day return to consummate his Kingdom. I agree, of course. Nor do I worry about the future.

Yet by another standard I think I may be a pessimist about what lies ahead. There's no lack of evidence of original sin. As I've admitted here before, the news and the news-related opinion I read on various Internet news sites often depresses me because (to put it in biblical terms) the wicked are flourishing and the righteous too often seem to stumble – or cause others to stumble.

Where have all the people gone?

Last week on the *Washington Post* website I read a news story about a Baptist church near Washington whose membership used to be 900 and is now 30. The pastor of that self-labeled "progressive" church can't figure out what has happened. He figures that changing the name of the church might help. Since its inception in the early 20th century it has been called Baptist Temple. It was, once upon a time, an evangelical church.

The pastor wants to get rid of both "temple" and "Baptist": he feels that "temple" is confusing and it's an embarrassment to be known as a Baptist these days. (He *could* safely set aside the Baptist designation; judging by his own description his church stopped being Baptist some time ago.)

After reading the story the answer to this pastor's and church's dwindling membership seemed child-simple to me: *preach the Gospel – the real, biblical Gospel – and they will come.*

(And then teach it, deeply and often, so as to help them live the Gospel.)

I offered that solution as part of the online comments to the story. I have no way of knowing, of course, whether my own comments made any impact. But I had to cast my bread upon the waters, as it were.

A couple of times I've personally watched this kind of disturbing blind-leading-the-blind in churches when working for a while in non-Reformed (and non-evangelical) congregations as an organist/choir director. "Where there is no vision the people perish." That absence is manifested in the belief that social programs, inclusiveness and non-judgmentalism (as defined outside of the Gospel) are what church is all about, and requires no radical changes in us, no living an ever more sanctified relationship with God in Christ.

Lost sheep in more ways than one

Whenever I see or read of this kind of situation – and it is rampant, sadly – I am astonished anew that the church leaders in those situations don't recognize the fundamental problem. They seem unaware that there is a deep-seated hunger for the Good News. They, in fact, seem not to know what the Good News is! They are shepherds who don't know that their sheep need to be fed, first to stay alive, then to flourish; or what to feed them.

What troubled me just as much in this particular instance in Washington was the torrent of vitriol unleashed in the comments on the newspaper's website against (true) Baptists and other evangelicals. It took only a post or two to conjure off-topic and off-the-wall reactions that even blamed President Bush for this church's ills and for the perceived benighted beliefs of all Baptists, and then all evangelicals. Fueled by those, other commenters launched into attacks on "religion" itself. The level of expressed hatred on the part of website respondents who clearly consider themselves religiously, socially and politically enlightened actually frightened me.

Two things occurred to me: first, devout Christians may be somewhat closer to experiencing out-and-out religious persecution in North America than most people stop to consider; secondly: the reactions of the majority of commenters were based on either serious misconceptions of evangelical Christianity, or on bad early experiences with Christianity, or on encounters with Christians who exhibited hypocrisy – at least in the eyes of those beholders; but true or not, the damage was done.

A bigger and bigger house of sand

Well, reading that story and some of the more than 100 comments about it put me in a less than "positive attitude." So I went to watch TV for a while. A nice nature program might be soothing, I thought. I turned to two that looked interesting, and switched between them for a while. One was about Alaska, the other about the South American rain forest. Both were spectacular in their revelation of exquisite wonders of creation. And both were just as spectacular in ignoring (implicitly denying) that any of it could have come from the hand of God (should God happen to exist).

That same week there had been news from Hartford, Connecticut, that one of two drivers who were racing each other hit a 74-year-old pedestrian and kept on driving. Hit-and-run accidents, sad to say, are not so unusual these days. But it was the reaction of witnesses that was even more troubling. Quite a few people saw the man get hit. They stuck around to look at him, in fact; one even circled slowly on a scooter. And not one of them tried to help the man or even call 911. To shake people up the police finally released the story, proven from security camera videotapes.

In that same Eastern-American city, 14-year-old girls were in the news (along with some from several other parts of the country) for sending nude photos of themselves to their "boyfriends."

As one troubled, thoughtful citizen of Hartford later said, "There's no moral compass anymore. It's gone." If God is missing from the Beginning, he'll be missing from the middle and the end.

Unnecessary Saviour

There are some weeks when I wish God would just blast us all out of here, separating the sheep from the goats as the pieces fall. But then I remind myself that some of the catastrophic events around the world apparently do entail God's judgment on the people and nations who continue to defy him (according to Scripture). And it's no joke to fall into the hands of the living God. In fact, "it is a dreadful thing" (Hebrews 10:31).

I would think it would be pretty obvious to most people that the "human spirit" is not improving, and that our sophisticated technology, ever-increasing medical knowledge and the combined intelligence of the world's scientific minds – while making life longer and much easier for some of us – is not going to save us, either sooner or later.

But surprisingly, a lot of people (especially educated people, ironically enough) don't see the evidence. Despite periodic personal problems, perhaps, humanity on the whole is improving and will prevail, thank you very much. The primitive tales told by hypocritical and violent religion, particularly Christianity, are only derailing us (they say).

It's getting harder and harder to convince people that they and the world need a Savior. But *we* are not the ones that need to do the convincing. Oh, we certainly must live lives that attest to the Hope that is within us and that are consonant with what God expects of us, so that we bring glory, not disgrace, to his name. But the Spirit – Hound of Heaven that he is – is the one who pursues the recalcitrant, who convinces and convicts even the most reluctant converts, from our next door neighbors, to the hurting and struggling around the world, to world-famous atheists who insist that the Spirit is a phantom of imagination. We need "only" pray, plead continually, believing that the Spirit will rescue them, not giving them what they deserve (and what we deserve before he pursued us). And the harvest will be great.

In the meantime – and it could be a long meantime – I will continue to find solace in

Scripture, of course, but also in the poetry of the great hymns and in the Psalter, encapsulating as they do biblical truth and comfort in singable, easily remembered form. Here's a time-tested German Lutheran chorale that came to mind in the context of this column:

Jesus sinners will receive:

*May they all this saying ponder
Who in sin's delusions live
And from God and heaven wander.
Here is hope for all who grieve:
Jesus sinners will receive.*

*We deserve but grief and shame,
Yet his words, rich grace revealing,
Pardon, peace, and life proclaim.
Here our ills have perfect healing;
We with humble hearts believe:
Jesus sinners will receive.*

*When their sheep have lost their way,
Faithful shepherds go to seek them;
Jesus watches all who stray,
Faithfully to find and take them
In his arms, that they may live –
Jesus sinners will receive.*

*Come, O sinners, one and all,
Come, accept his invitation;
Come, obey his gracious call,
Come and take his free salvation.
Firmly in these words believe:
Jesus sinners will receive.*

*Jesus sinners will receive,
Even me he has forgiven;
And when I this earth must leave,
I shall find an open heaven.
Dying, still to him I cleave –
Jesus sinners will receive.*

Text: Erdmann Neumeister, 1671-1756
Tune: MEINEN JESUM LASS ICH NICHT (Johan Ulich, 1634-1712)

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY. She may be contacted by email at: mvantil@roadrunner.com or via her website: www.wordpowerpublishing.com





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Classifieds

<div>Anniversary</div> <div>Believing that the Lord has brought them together, Jack and Hilda DeVries and Bruce and Trish Stephen are happy to announce the wedding of</div> <div>Nancy and Brad</div> <div>The wedding will take place DV on July 5, 2008 at the home of Brad's parents in North Vancouver. Our prayer is that the Lord will bless Nancy and Brad as they begin their new life together.</div> <div>Their contact address is: PO Box 5056, Squamish BC V8B 0C2</div>		<div>Anniversary</div> <div>July 4, 1958, Owen Sound</div> <div></div> <div>July 4, 2008, Kitchener</div> <div></div> <div>With thanks and praise to God, we are pleased to announce the Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary of our parents,</div> <div>HANS AND STIEN NUSSELDER</div> <div>You are invited to celebrate God's faithfulness with us during an Open House Reception to be held, D. V., on Saturday, July 5, 2008 at Laurentian Hills Christian School, 11 Laurentian Drive, Kitchener from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m.</div> <div>We love you, Mom and Dad, and look forward to celebrating this day with you!</div> <div>Helen and Mike Plaisier – Christina, Peter and Julie Phil and Annette Nusselder – Matthew, Connor and Nicole</div> <div>Address: Hans and Stien Nusselder 1257 Ottawa St South, Kitchener ON N2E 1L9</div>		
<div>Birthday</div> <div>"Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances."</div> <div>By God's grace on July 27th, 2008</div> <div>John Streutker will celebrate his 80th Birthday.</div> <div>We invite you to celebrate with Dad & Annie at an Open House on Saturday, July 26th from 2-4 p.m. at the Maranatha Christian Reformed Church of Woodstock Best Wishes only.</div> <div>With love from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren Grace & Tony Vandendool Dorothy & Alf Geerlinks Rita & Gerald Klein Geltink Clarence & Sandy Streutker Richard & Corina Streutker Andrew & Rebecca Streutker 22 grandchildren, 5 great-grandchildren</div> <div>Home address: 565459 Towerline Rd RR 8, Woodstock ON N4S 7W3</div>				
<div>Anniversary</div> <div></div> <div>1958</div> <div>July 21</div> <div>2008</div> <div>Telkwa B.C.</div> <div>Wow! Amazing!</div> <div>What a blessing – 50 years of marriage</div> <div>We celebrate with our parents</div> <div>JOHN AND LENY BOONSTRA (nee Winkelman)</div> <div>We praise you God for the gift of marriage, for your love and faithfulness to all generations.</div> <div>We praise God for you, Dad and Mom, and look back to see so many of God's gifts to us as a family. We love you. You are a blessing to us all.</div> <div>Joanne & John Wisselink Rachel, Justin, Joshua, Reuben, Tiana</div> <div>John & Laurie Boonstra Karen & Nathan (Kendra, Bradey, Nolan), Debbie & Thoren (fiancé), Jason, Jolene & Clayton (Kaylee), Krissa & Jesse, Kevin</div> <div>Rick & Verna Boonstra Amy-Lou, Glen & Lorelee, Lisa, Wendy, Jesse, Faye</div> <div>Ed & Heather Boonstra Lana, Elyssa, Hannah</div> <div>Monica & John Geertsma Corey, Kyler, Kalen</div> <div>Stanley & Maria Boonstra Ryan, Jared, Gavin</div> <div>Marvin & Carol Boonstra Rebecca, Mark, Jessica, Ashley</div> <div>Floyd Boonstra Nellie & Chris Cockerill Teesha, Zachery, Jena</div> <div>Wes & Jen Boonstra Evan, Anna</div> <div>Address: John & Leny Boonstra 20479 Yellowhead Highway Telkwa BC V0J 2X2</div> <div></div>		<div></div> <div>Psalm 37:4</div> <div>Rev. JOHN AND CAROLYN BOONSTRA (Ruiter)</div> <div>June 17, 1958 Houston, British Columbia.</div> <div>Who served congregations together in Brandon Manitoba, Duncan British Columbia, Edmonton Alberta, Maple Ridge and Kelowna British Columbia and various congregations across Canada and the United States since 'retirement'.</div> <div>With love from your children and grandchildren: Pat & Rob (with Jesus) Jessica, Rebecca John & Sue Devin, Derek, Shane, Sharla, Jenna Deb & Harv Cameron, Alyssa, Brendan, David, Ethan Pete & Jean Antony, Andre, Jacques Jacquie & Walt and Dan.</div> <div>We have been blessed during your 50 Years of Marriage.</div> <div>We thank God for your love for each other and for all of us.</div> <div><i>The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.</i></div> <div>To send them a congratulatory note: Mail: 430 Madsen Road Kelowna BC V1X 2C2 Email: jboonstra@shaw.ca</div> <div></div>		
<div>Thank you</div> <div>Kim Yungblut has worked full-time or part-time for <i>Christian Courier</i> for over 25 years. These past years she has been invaluable on mailing day. She knows Canada by postal codes. Recently she had surgery for stage 1 breast cancer and has been having chemo treatments and will have radiation treatments. During all this she has diligently directed our mail-out to you.</div> <div>Thank You Kim.</div> <div>We also want to thank Grace Bowman and Sonya Vanderveen Feddema for pitching in to help with the mailing during this time of stress and busyness with medical appointments.</div> <div>Thank you all for your prayers which help sustain us during this time of Harry's illness.</div> <div>Harry & Rose</div>		<div>Graduation</div> <div></div> <div>TIMOTHY ANTONIDES</div> <div>recently graduated with a</div> <div>Phd. in English from Illinois State University.</div> <div>Tim and his wife Monica, nee Rumph, live in Surrey BC with their twin boys Daniel and Zachary.</div> <div>Congratulations Tim !</div>		<div>Classifieds</div> <div>SUBMITTING YOUR AD</div> <div>For anniversaries and obituaries, email rose@christiancourier.ca</div> <div>For all other, email ads@christiancourier.ca</div> <div>Mail: Christian Courier 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1</div> <div>OTHER INFORMATION: <i>Christian Courier</i> reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style and is not responsible for any errors due to hand-written or phoned-in advertisements</div>

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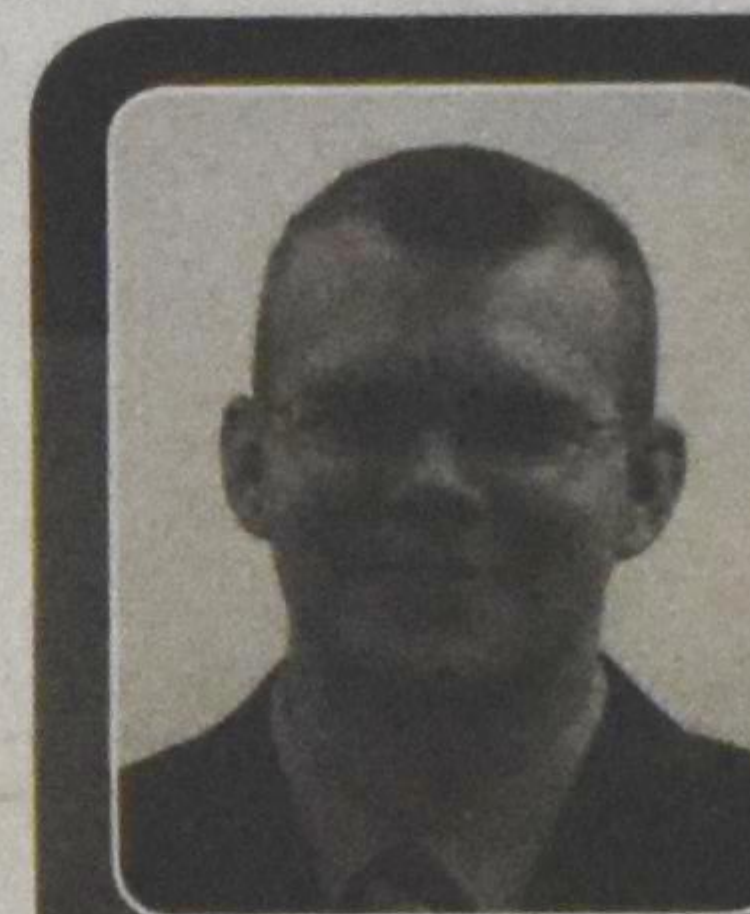
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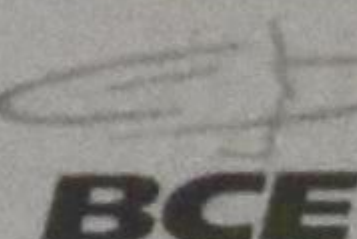
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News

Can farmers salvage a soaked planting season?

Ebbing water, good weather brighten outlook in Midwest, but numerous obstacles remain.

Richard Mertens (CSM)

Chicago — When the rains finally stopped and the sun began to dry their rain-soaked fields, the Bowman family and their neighbors wasted little time. Last week, they scrambled to plant fields that had lain too wet to plant all spring. Some of them worked late into the night, their high-intensity tractor lights piercing the darkness and global-positioning devices guiding them straight across barren fields.

"A lot of progress has been made this week," says Chris Bowman, who, with his father, farms about 2,000 acres near DeWitt, Iowa. "I'd say a lot of the crop is in."

Receding water and clear weather have rekindled the hopes of many Midwestern farmers. Even as rising water broke through levees on the Mississippi River, flooding more towns and farmland, elsewhere in the region farmers rushed to take advantage of a spell of good weather, eager to salvage what was left of the rapidly concluding planting season.

Some farmers, like the Bowmans, were able for the first time this season to plant fields that had until now been too wet to plant. Others replanted fields for the second or third time. Still others waited anxiously for a few more days of good weather to dry the mud and ponded water that still kept them out of their fields.

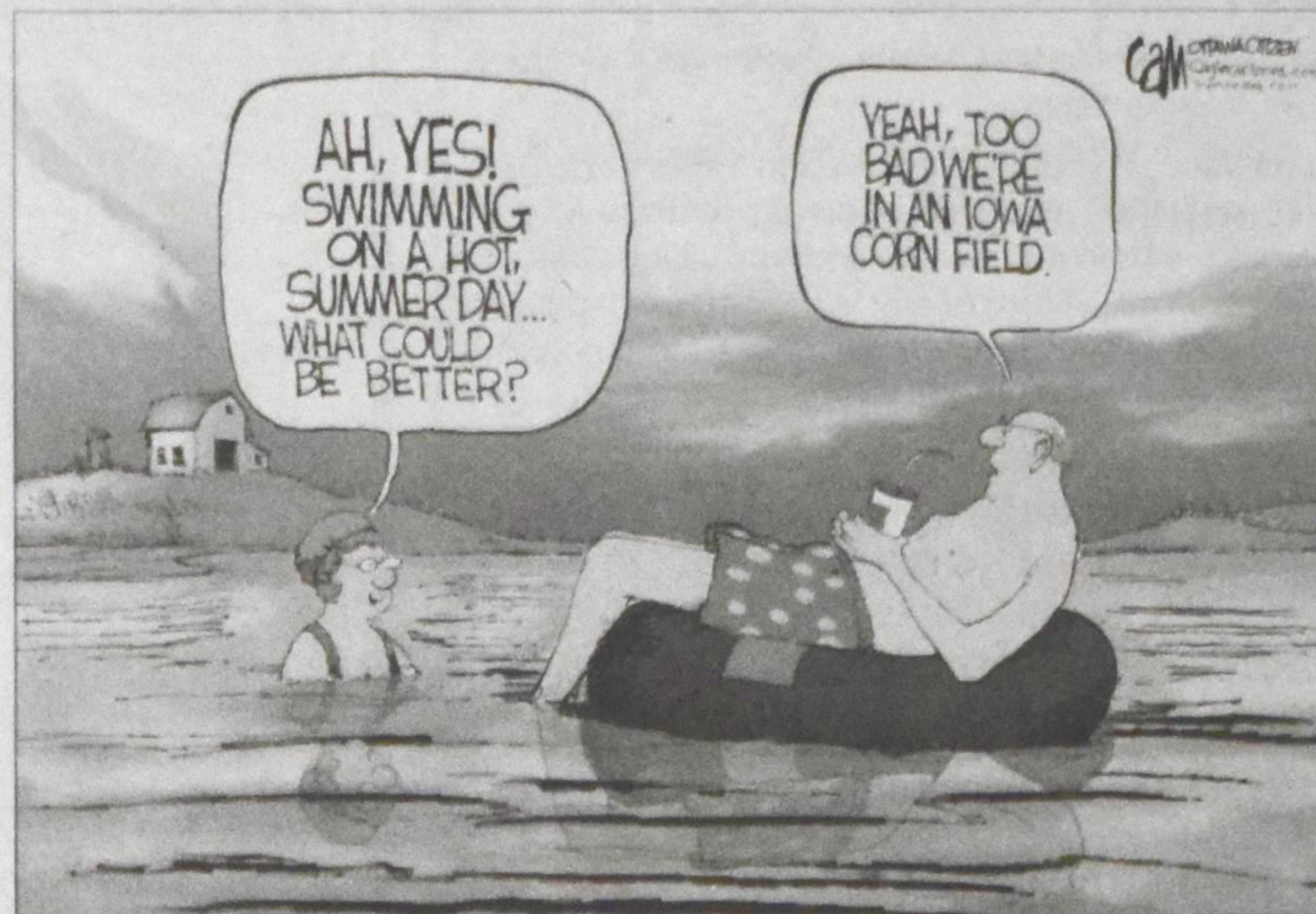
At the same time, the improving condi-

tions quickly affected the commodity markets. The price of a bushel of corn, which had risen for two straight weeks, began to fall after reaching record levels of nearly \$8 a bushel. Terry Roggensack, an agricultural specialist for The Hightower Report, a firm that does research for brokerage firms and the Chicago Board of Trade, says news of flooding along the Mississippi River was less important than the return of good weather.

"It's very good television and good drama, and it's good to put the guy on there who lost 10,000 acres when the levee broke," says Mr. Roggensack. "But in terms of the grain market, it's a small thing when it's 80 degrees and sunny in the Midwest."

No one knows yet just how much this year's flooding has damaged crops. Flood and rain damage are not the only problems. The cool, wet spring has held back crops almost everywhere. Corn that should rise above the knees at this time of year now barely scrapes the ankles in many places.

Equally uncertain is how, in the end, the weather and flooding will affect prices on the Chicago Board of Trade and in the supermarket. Many people are looking forward to the US Department of Agriculture's crop report that comes out a week from today. Clearly some corn and soybeans, the main crops



here on is not a good bet," he says.

For Mr. Gray, as for other farmers, the prospect of a poor crop is especially bitter this year because record commodity prices had raised hopes of a highly profitable season. "At this point, the year we could have hoped for is gone," he says.

Farmers across central Iowa, where shallow depressions known as prairie pot-holes are scattered across the landscape, suffered some of the most widespread damage in the region. Gary Woodley,

who farms near the town of Clarion, struggled to plant almost all his crop of corn and soybeans. Then the rains destroyed a fifth of his crop. Water filled the depressions, eroded hillsides, and buried parts of his fields in silt. At the end of last week Mr. Woodley said he was still hoping to replant.

across Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and adjoining states, were lost. Researchers at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., and the University of Tennessee in Knoxville have estimated agricultural damage in Iowa, the largest corn-producing state and the worst hit by the floods, at \$2.7 billion.

Farming difficulties vary by region

The challenge for farmers varies widely across the region. Like many farmers, Chris Bowman and his father, Robert, had never managed to finish their spring planting because frequent heavy rains kept the soil too wet to plant. Last week they hired neighbors to help them and, in two days, working day and night with four planters, planted nearly a square mile of soybeans.

"We can't risk getting rained on again," says Robert Bowman, a former president of the Iowa Corn Growers Association. "People are pulling out all the stops."

Jim Legg of Bridgeport, in southern Illinois, faces a far more difficult situation. He had just finished planting earlier this month when the Embarrass River overflowed and inundated every one of his 750 acres. The low ground behind his house lay under 10 to 12 feet of water. He had seen floods before, but never so extensive. The river returned to its banks on Wednesday, and Mr. Legg planted 100 acres of soybeans on the higher ground on Friday. If there was any consolation in his misfortune, it was that the flooding came early enough for him to replant.

"You have to be optimistic, or you wouldn't farm," he says.

Much of the damage across the region was inflicted less by flooding than simply by heavy and frequent rains. Ron Gray, a farmer in Claremont, Ill., was able to plant only about half his 1,500 acres before rain forced him from his fields this spring. He says he will take insurance losses on what he couldn't plant.

"It's a business decision," he says. Planting now might be possible, but the risk of a poor crop is rising with each passing day.

"Good luck has not followed me to here, and to assume I'm going to be lucky from

Farmers race against the clock

But time is running out. In a normal year farmers hope to have their corn and soybeans planted by the middle of May so that the crops can mature before the frost. Corn specialist Roger Elmore of Iowa State University in Ames says he spent part of last week running computer programs to figure out whether there was still time to plant corn.

Many farmers say it is already too late to plant corn; most are putting in soybeans, which they can plant until the beginning of June and which are also at record prices.

Even as hopes rise, profound uncertainties remain. If the weather is good this summer, with rain and heat in moderation and at the right times, many farmers say they can still expect a good harvest. But more rain in the next few days, a dry spell at the wrong time, or an early frost could cut their yields dramatically.

The same uncertainty hangs over the commodities markets. Even before the flooding, the Agriculture Department was forecasting tight supplies of corn this fall. Analysts will be looking closely at the long-range weather forecasts released Monday.

"Given we're looking at late-planted crops, it raises concerns for the harvest," says Chad Hart, an agricultural economist at Iowa State University. "How will the weather cooperate? Will we get a hard frost before we're able to harvest the crop in the fall?"

In DeWitt, Iowa, the Bowmans, like many other farmers, are hopeful.

"There's still a lot of potential out here," Chris Bowman says. "It's been pretty challenging for everybody. It was pretty amazing, though, when the weather was good, how fast the crop went in."

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